

"Like" what you see?
The Impact of Facebook Likes against the Background of
Conformity Goals and Self-Presentational Concerns

by

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Study 1

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Abstract

Social network sites nowadays provide technical features embedded within a network of social connections that allow for large-scale social influence processes (Fogg, 2008) to become more and more prevalent in online users' everyday lives. The present thesis aims to investigate this social influence phenomenon, focusing on the question of how and through which mechanisms the display of other users' *likes* (a public positive evaluation of content on Facebook that is created by clicking the "like"-button on any given content) on organizational Facebook Pages elicit conformity reactions. In a literature review on mechanisms similar to the *like*-feature on Facebook, a gap in theoretical as well as empirical work concerning this topic is identified that the present thesis aims to address by presenting a comprehensive theoretical framework that is tested by means of a mixed-method approach. The theoretical framework focuses on goals for yielding to social influence and is complemented by situational and personal influence factors, conformity outcomes and self-presentational concerns. The resulting guiding research questions are concerned with the questions of 1) which goals for conformity are observable, 2) which situational and personal aspects affect conformity, and 3) how self-presentational concerns interact with public conformity. Three empirical studies are presented, starting with a qualitative investigation of the aforementioned phenomena, followed by two quantitative studies in a laboratory environment that aim to explore certain influence factors of the framework in more detail and to allow inferences regarding the potential underlying goals for conformity. Results show that the aim of making a right decision (goal of accuracy) and the aim of creating and maintaining a positive self-image (goal of positive self-evaluation) can very well explain several of the observed conformity reactions. Furthermore, the aim of gaining social approval and avoiding social rejections (goal of affiliation) was observed to be closely associated with the self-presentational concern of pleasing the audience of self-presentation. Publicness of the conformity reaction as well as knowledge of and attitude towards the respective Facebook Page topic as subject of evaluation and similarity to the influencing agents have been found to affect conformity reactions. Furthermore, results indicate that also number of *likes* can affect conformity, but the respective relationship towards the influencing agents might be more important. *Liking* a Page is found to represent a form of carefully constructed self-presentation on Facebook, whereas the main goal is to appear authentic. Additionally, *like*-behavior is found to be guided by self-presentational preferences associated with (positive and negative) audience reactions. Consequently, like-displays are found to guide like-behavior rather than cause it, because self-presentational concerns seem to be more important. Theoretical, methodological and practical consequences are discussed and directions for future research on this topic are derived.

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Terms and Abbreviations

Frequently used terms from the Facebook context:

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| to <i>like</i> : | To press the <i>like</i> -button on any content on Facebook, e.g. on a Facebook Page |
| a <i>like</i> : | Connection between a user and some form of Facebook content (e.g. a Page), established by clicking the <i>like</i> -button |
| social context: | Term used by Facebook to describe the display of other users' actions on Facebook (<i>liking</i> , sharing, commenting etc.) or other social platforms to their Facebook friends |
| <i>like</i> -display: | Public display of other users' <i>likes</i> on any form of Facebook content, referred to in two different forms within the present thesis: friend- and fan-displays |
| friend-display: | Presents <i>likes</i> of connected Facebook friends, either in the form of names, profile photos or an anonymous number |
| fan-display: | Presents <i>likes</i> of not-connected Facebook users, usually in the form of anonymous numbers |

Frequently used abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| GRQ: | Guiding Research Question (on thesis-level) |
| RQ: | Research Question (on study-level) |
| CMC: | Computer-Mediated Communication |
| FTF: | Face-to-Face (communication or interaction) |
| eWOM: | Electronic Word-of-Mouth |
| MIP: | Mass Interpersonal Persuasion |
| RSC: | Reduced Social Cues Approach |
| SCT: | Self-Categorization Theory |
| SIDE: | Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects |
| SIPT: | Social Information Processing Theory |
| SNS: | Social Network Site(s) |

Chapter 1

Introduction

SNS are nowadays commonly used for marketing purposes by different kinds of organizations, profit as well as non-profit (e.g. Kapin, 2013; Nielsen, 2013). Facebook as the largest platform of its kind with a reported 1.15 billion registered users worldwide (Facebook, 2013d) seems to be of particular interest to marketers, as Facebook also reports a steady increase in organizational use: Back in 2012, Facebook (2012a) reported around 50 million Pages (an organizational presence on Facebook, e.g. for a cause, campaign or brand). In the first quarter of 2014, there were already 30 million Facebook Pages operated by small- to medium-sized businesses alone with 137 million *likes* just from Germany alone (Hutter, 2014). Launched in 2009, the *like*-feature represents a way of expressing a positive attitude towards any kind of content on Facebook (WhatIs, 2010). Users can *like* postings, pictures, videos or comments of other users just as they can *like* entire Facebook Pages as well as their content and users do so at least approximately 4.5 million times per day (August 2012 to May 2013, Facebook, 2013g). All actions taken on Facebook (such as *liking* an organizational Page) are closely connected to the platform's social graph, displaying users' actions to their Facebook friends (social context, see e.g. Sullivan, 2014) as well as other unfamiliar users on Facebook in the form of anonymized *like*-displays. The presentation of social context has not only recently become a fundamental component of all Facebook Ads (Facebook, 2014c) but Facebook has also opened up its social graph for third-party information, allowing Facebook to display actions that users' friends have taken on other websites or applications (Ellison & boyd, 2013). These mechanisms allow for new ways of social influence, characterized by an enormous potential regarding pace and impact, a form of mass interpersonal persuasion (Fogg, 2008; Weiksner et al., 2008).

These recent developments illustrate the relevance of social context when it comes to distributing marketing content as well as organizational and corporate information: Environments like Facebook seem to provide the perfect preconditions for persuasion and thus social influence processes among

users, allowing for viral processes to occur. Considering the potential pervasiveness of influence processes in millions of users' everyday lives, the question arises which mechanisms determine these processes and which aspects affect attitude change or according behavior. However, so far empirical research has scarcely focused on mechanisms such as *like*-displays and associated processes of mass interpersonal persuasion (Fogg, 2008), particularly regarding what Facebook defines as social context - the ubiquitous presentation of familiar others' interaction with third party content. There exists a huge body of research and also theoretical work that is concerned with detecting and explaining the psychological mechanisms of social influence in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Most of this work focuses on anonymous online communication, for example research based on the *social information processing theory* (Walther, 1992) or a large number of studies aiming to test the *social identity model of deindividuation effects* (Spears & Lea, 1992). However, the Internet and the way people interact with each other online has undergone fundamental changes since the emergence of social network sites: They represent *nonymous* environments (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) that people use to contact friends and acquaintances they already know from different contexts of their offline life (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Recently, a line of research has emerged that focuses on objective methodologies such as social network analysis, allowing for an observation of real-life behavior on Facebook. In this context, particularly large-scale field experiments have gained increased media attention, for example the "61-million-person experiment" published by Bond and colleagues in 2012 or a study by Muchnik, Aral and Taylor published in 2013. Results of both studies indeed suggest that the presentation of other users' actions can alter attitude as well as online and offline behavior (e.g. voting, see Bond et al., 2012). Sometimes, these kinds of field experiments take into account the particular relationship between users, e.g. through means of social network analysis (see Egebark & Ekström, 2011) or by using system data provided by users (such as the declaration of "friendship" via the system, see Muchnik et al., 2013). Results of the aforementioned studies suggest that close friends or people that users interact with more frequently are more influential than unknown users. Although very useful regarding external validity, objective methods such as social network analysis are very limited when it comes to conclusions about underlying psychological mechanisms (Shang & Croson, 2009). This is of particular relevance when taking into account that social networks on Facebook usually consist of contacts from the different social contexts of users' lives (e.g. Lampinen et al., 2009). Social network analysis is limited in detecting these nuances in relationships between users or in separating group and interpersonal processes (as both might operate in CMC, depending on the environment; see for example Ren, Kraut & Kiesler, 2007). Consequently, the question how and through which mechanisms *like*-displays on Facebook foster social influence still remains to be answered.

The aforementioned observations imply a gap regarding theoretical work on social influence processes in nonymous computer-mediated communication as well as a gap in empirical investigation of said processes. In 2011, Kai Sassenberg noted that "Social influence [...] involving participants who have known each other for a while - which certainly makes up most of the actual communication - has rarely been studied" (Sassenberg, 2011, p. 71). To my knowledge, this statement still applies in 2014. Taking into account the potential prevalence, pace and according impact of social influence (see Fogg, 2008) through the display of other users' actions - particularly when looking at practical implications for marketers (as initially described) or for social engagement (as the study by Bond and colleagues (2012) illustrates) - this aspect seems worth focusing on in more detail. Consequently, the present thesis aims to address this described gap in research and theoretical conceptualizations by focusing on the investigation of social influence processes regarding the *like*-feature on Facebook Pages through the presentation of other users' *likes*, both by unknown users as well as familiar peers. Based on a review of literature on social influence, a theoretical framework will be presented that meets the characteristics of social network sites as a form of computer-mediated communication. Three empirical studies will be reported that cover a variety of methodological approaches to answer research questions and hypotheses that arise from the theoretical conceptualization.

In detail, the theoretical approach used here is that of conformity as a target-centered (e.g. Kim, 2013), incidental (Hewstone & Martin, 2012) form of social influence. As the relevant theories on CMC focus on anonymous communication and are not applicable to Facebook, the present approach will draw on classic conformity theories from face-to-face contexts. In doing so, the framework will focus on the underlying goals for yielding to social influence, which have been conceptualized, tested and extended in face-to-face contexts by various authors over the last decades. The four presented goals (the goal of accuracy, the goal of affiliation, the goal of positive self-evaluation and the goal of cognitive consistency) are of qualitative nature (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Hence, to allow conclusions about those goals based on empirical observations, all four goals will be linked to respective conformity outcomes (public and private) as well as influence factors, such as the number of influencing agents, the relationship towards the source of influence or the target's knowledge of the subject of evaluation. Regarding public evaluations, previous work has found the conformity goal of affiliation to be closely associated with self-presentational concerns of pleasing the audience (Leary, 1995). Here, a fundamental difference between face-to-face (FTF) communication and the SNS situation arises, because the audience of conformity behavior is largely undetermined (Krämer & Winter, 2008) and potentially very heterogeneous (Lampinen et al., 2009). As a consequence, the theoretical basis of this thesis has been extended with the concept of self-presentation, providing a review of theoretical approaches as well as empirical findings regarding social network sites. Finally, the latter will be linked

to the mechanisms suggested by the presented conformity framework, identifying and presenting situations in which these might co-occur or interfere with regard to *like*-displays on Facebook Pages.

Three main guiding research questions arise from the theoretical body of this thesis about conformity and self-presentation, all of which will be addressed in the empirical studies with different foci:

GRQ1: Which goals for conformity are relevant to social influence processes regarding *like*-displays on Facebook?

GRQ2: Which situational and personal aspects affect conformity elicited through *like*-displays and in which ways?

GRQ3: How do self-presentational goals on Facebook affect conformity processes regarding *like*-behavior?

The three empirical studies reported in the present thesis follow different methodological approaches. Study 1 will provide the basis for the empirical work of this thesis. It represents an exploratory approach, using a semi-structured interview in combination with a think-aloud protocol, hence a qualitative methodology. The aim of study 1 is to explore the extent to which *like*-displays are taken into account when evaluating Pages and to investigate which conformity motives and influence factors suggested by the literature review are observable in a qualitative way. Furthermore, study 1 will approach the question if and to what extent self-presentational concerns play a role when it comes to *liking*, combined with the question of whether the respective concerns might interfere with conformity goals. Based on some of the results of study 1 as well as results of the literature review, the following two quantitative studies will focus on investigating the role of the identified influence factors and self-presentational concerns to allow inferences regarding the underlying conformity motives. In doing so, study 2 employs a laboratory experiment, focusing on the influence factor of a number and type (unfamiliar fans vs. friends) of influencing agents. Furthermore, conformity processes will be linked to personal dispositions found to be associated with self-presentational motivation (public self-consciousness) to further explore and quantitatively investigate the relationship between potential conformity goals and self-presentational concerns on Facebook. Finally, study 3 will focus explicitly on the role of relational characteristics regarding familiar Facebook friends. Relevant relational aspects identified in the literature review and through the results of study 1 will be investigated regarding their predictive power when it comes to conformity reactions, using a correlative approach in a laboratory environment, employing a field stimulus. Furthermore, study 3 will approach familiarity with the subject of evaluation as a potential impact factor for conformity. Also in study 3, the role of self-presentational concerns will be addressed by exploring in which way self-presentational preferences (protective self-presentation) affect conformity processes.

Table 1: Overview of Empirical Studies of the Present Thesis

| Study | Methodology | Focus/Aim | According GRQ |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | qualitative inter-view, think-aloud | determine the relevance of <i>like</i> -displays, identifying potential motives and influence factors | GRQ1, GRQ2 + GRQ3 |
| 2 | laboratory experiment | explore the impact of friend- and fan-displays with a focus on number of influencing agents, investigate the role of public self-consciousness | GRQ2 + GRQ3 (based on that, inferences for GRQ1 can be made) |
| 3 | correlative laboratory study | explore the impact of relational characteristics of friend-displays and the impact of familiarity with the subject of evaluation, investigate the role of protective self-presentation | GRQ2 + GRQ3 (based on that, inferences for GRQ1 can be made) |

The use of different methodological approaches with different foci aims to provide a look at the complex topic of conformity on Facebook (along with self-presentation) from different perspectives and with different advantages regarding qualitative insights, as well as external and internal validity.

In the following, the theoretical section will first provide a detailed description of Facebook's platform features, particular Pages and the *like*-feature, in order to illustrate the potential for electronic word-of-mouth and mass interpersonal persuasion (chapter 2). Subsequently, the main chapter on social influence will open with a working definition of the phenomenon (chapter 3.1) and subsequently, a more detailed review of empirical work that matches the environmental characteristics outlined before (chapter 3.2.1) as well as a review of theoretical approaches to CMC so far (chapter 3.2.3) will be provided. The identified gap in theoretical conceptualizations will then be approached by arranging classical theoretical approaches of conformity into a comprehensive framework (chapter 3.3), as previously outlined. Finally, self-presentation as the second basic theoretical approach will be presented and linked to the concept of conformity (chapter 4). Both theoretical approaches will be discussed against the outlined mechanisms on Facebook, resulting in loose predictions regarding several possibilities of the underlying processes as well as specific guiding research questions (chapter 5). Subsequently, the three empirical studies will be reported.

Chapter 2

Facebook's Potential for Social Influence in the Form of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

"Facebook eWOM is delivered on a silver plate" (Svensson, 2011, p. 9)

The following section aims to provide an overview of the online environment and the respective mechanisms on which the present research focuses. Against the background of research challenges, outlined by Ellison and boyd (2013), who suggested documenting the current state and socio-technical changes in more detail to allow for comparisons between studies, social network sites and particularly the Facebook environment in its current form will be described along with those characteristics assumed to be crucial for social influence.

2.1 Social Network Sites

Originating in the late 90's with the emergence of the Web2.0 phenomenon (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison & boyd, 2013), social network sites (SNS) have become increasingly relevant to people's everyday online experience. Nowadays, 72% of all American Internet users use SNS (1st quarter of 2013, Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2013). In 2007, danah boyd and Nicole Ellison were the first to provide a definition of SNS for use in communication research, describing an SNS as

„web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a

connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211).

Since the first SNS were launched (e.g. Friendster in 2002, boyd & Ellison, 2007), the respective features and usage as well as communication patterns have been subject to constant change. As a consequence, they suggested a revision of their original definition in 2013:

„A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by the connections on the site.“ (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p.158).

Their new definition accounts for the increasing relevance of news aggregation features within SNS, while the personal profile has decreased in importance - although it still provides the basis for all communicative activities and self-presentation, as described by Ellison and boyd (2013). All the respective features that are relevant for the present research (profile, connections and News Feed) will be described in the following paragraphs in more detail.

In addition, SNS then and now further allow for different forms of communication, such as one-to-many or one-to-one through synchronous and asynchronous channels (Ellison & boyd, 2013). One aspect that has not changed since the emergence of these technologies, but that distinguish SNS from earlier forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC), is that user profiles are usually linked to real people, similar to online dating sites, implying that anonymity has become increasingly less prevalent in contrast to other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) like forums and newsgroups (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Zhao et al., 2008). Furthermore, online profiles are embedded within a network of anchored relationships, as people tend to use SNS to stay in contact with people they already know (boyd, 2008a), hence SNS represent *nonymous* online environments (Zhao et al., 2008). Based on these characteristics, Ellison and boyd (2013) also discuss the terminology used to describe these platforms: While *social network* refers to the sociological concept of a person's network in general (also offline), an *online social network* describes the sum of contacts online (not restricted to a single platform) and *social networking site* emphasizes the emergence of new bonds with people unknown to each other. Consequently, the authors suggest the term *social network site* as the most fitting.

2.2 Facebook Features

Facebook, the world's most successful SNS (eMarketer, 2013), was founded in 2004 (Facebook, 2013e) and had 1.15 billion registered users worldwide (699 million of whom were active on a regular basis) in the second quarter of 2013 (Facebook, 2013d). Across the world, Facebook reported 1.28 billion visitors in the first quarter of 2014 (PR Newswire, 2014). In Germany alone, 19 million people use Facebook on a daily basis (25 million on a monthly basis) (Wiese, 2013). Facebook describes its mission as giving

“people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what is going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.” (Facebook, 2013e).

In the following, a detailed description of Facebook's main features (relevant for the purpose of the present research) will be provided.

2.2.1 Personal Profile

The basis of a personal profile on Facebook is a page which a user can complete with information about him/herself, such as gender, education, contact information, work and a profile picture (Facebook, 2013c). Originally, SNS profiles were mostly limited to this information and overall were very static (Ellison & boyd, 2013). When launched in 2004, the most frequent activity on Facebook was browsing other people's profiles (Wise, Albahash & Park, 2010 in Svensson, 2011). Over time, updating profiles became easier and more common (via status updates), in the process of which media sharing (and commenting) became increasingly important – not only on Facebook but also on other social media platforms, such as twitter or MySpace (Ellison & boyd, 2013). In consequence, features like the News Feed (outlined later) have gained more and more attention, in which those updates and postings are collected: „today's SNS are more like news aggregators than they are like profile-based contexts“ (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 155). In the course of this, the basic profile (that includes personal information) has decreased in relevance, so that a Facebook profile nowadays mainly consists of shared media and information (Ellison & boyd, 2013), as illustrated in Figure 1.

Ellison and boyd (2013) also describe how this development affects the ways in which profiles are created: While in the beginning, only the user him/herself was able to update the profile, they are now becoming more and more co-constructed, representing a mixture between user-provided content, activity reports (e.g. *likes*, new contact, updates to the “about” section that includes

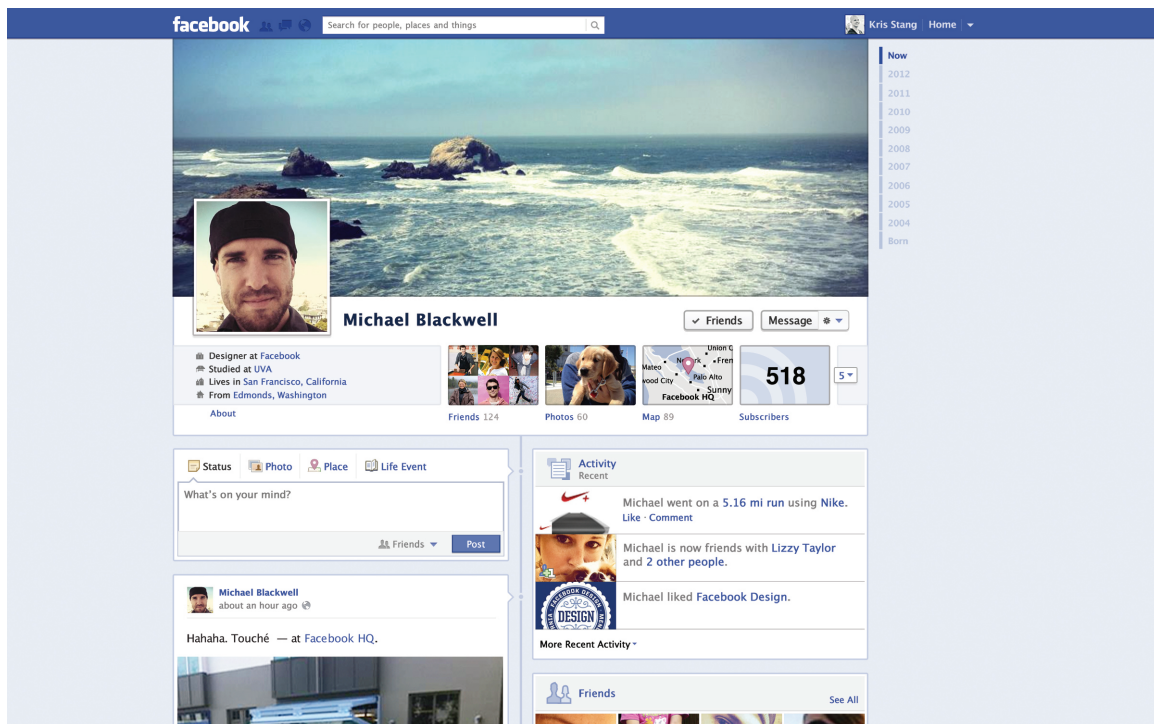


Figure 1. Facebook Timeline (Facebook, 2014)

personal information), other-provided content (e.g. wall posts, tags) and system-provided content (e.g. automatic updates/posts via external apps, such as foursquare, Instagram or YouTube).

In September 2011, Facebook took the next step within the development of SNS profiles (co-construction and media sharing had already been crucial aspects of Facebook profiles before that) by introducing a new kind of profile, the Timeline (Facebook, 2013f). According to Facebook (2013h), the Timeline is meant to tell a life story, indicating that the new profile aggregates and stores information and activities for a long period of time. Accordingly, visitors can browse through different stages of a user's personal life, e.g. by choosing a year on the right side of the Timeline (as seen on Facebook September 2013), see Figure 1. The Timeline still allows for the integration of personal information (on the left side or by clicking "about") and a profile picture. In addition, the Timeline combines all postings (status updates, photos, videos), Facebook activities, app activities, friend lists and interests (in the form of *likes*, as will be outlined later) (Facebook, 2013c).

2.2.2 Public Contacts: Social and Open Graph

The possibility of connecting one's own profile (visibly) to that of other users has always been a defining feature of SNS and fulfills different purposes, such as displaying relations, determining the visibility of content and representing a way of filtering other users' content (Ellison & boyd, 2013). A user's list of contacts (on Facebook they are called *friends*) represents his/her social network, „the

collection of social relations of varying strengths and importance that a person maintains“ (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 155). Although Facebook contacts are called friends, the term is widely regarded as being misleading as only about a quarter of a person’s network seems to consist of people they consider to be close friends (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2011) while other contacts are classified as weak ties (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007). As a consequence, one’s own social network tends to be comprised of many different people from different contexts of one’s offline-life (so-called context collapse), which in turn can have extensive consequences for self-presentation and self-disclosure (e.g. Vitak, 2012). This aspect will be described in more detail in chapter 4.6.1.3.

Through social connections within Facebook’s social graph, so-called *stories* are created (Facebook, 2014), distributing actions such as commenting, sharing or *liking* quickly and automatically among contacts. Indeed, this social context has recently become a fundamental component of all Facebook Ads (Facebook, 2014), allowing advertisers to target friends of their Page’s fans. Furthermore, Facebook’s open API and development platforms allow the social graph to be applied outside of the actual platform as well (Ellison & boyd, 2013), using the so-called *open graph* (e.g. users can show which books they recommended on other retailer sites, see Facebook, 2014). How advertisers may concretely use these possibilities will be outlined in chapter 2.3.2 on social media marketing.

2.2.3 Newsfeed

As already mentioned in chapter 2.2.1, the Facebook News Feed (introduced in 2006; Wikipedia, 2013), represents an aggregation of news, updates and activities from one’s friend network (Webopedia, 2013). Facebook describes it as

“the core feature of a person’s homepage [...] a regularly updating list of stories from friends, Pages, and other entities to which the person is connected on Facebook. It includes posts, photos, event updates, group memberships, app updates, and other activities. Each person’s News Feed is personalized based on his or her interests and the sharing activity of his or her friends. Stories in a user’s News Feed are prioritized based on several factors, including how many friends have Liked or Commented on a certain piece of content, who posted the content, and what type of content it is.” (Facebook, 2012a, Part I, Item1. Business)

This *social awareness stream* (Naaman, Boase & Lai, 2010; Ellison & boyd, 2013) has become a central feature (and starting point) of users’ browsing activities on SNS, presumably causing a decrease in browsing on actual personal profiles (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Accordingly, a qualitative study by Svensson from 2011, meant to explore Facebook’s potential for peer influence, found that

the News Feed seems to be the users' main interest when visiting the platform. Their study revealed this interest to be based on the fact that the News Feed provides information about one's own social network, creating a "feeling of knowing" (p.2). Figure 2 displays an example News Feed, provided by Facebook, 2014.



Figure 2. Facebook News Feed (Facebook, 2014)

2.2.4 The *Like*-Button

In February 2009, Facebook launched the *like*-button, “a feature that allows users to show their support for specific comments, pictures, wall posts, statuses, or fan pages” (Whatls, 2010). By *liking* other users' content, people are able to express approval or a positive attitude towards it without leaving a written comment (Whatls, 2010). This feature is not just available for other users' content and on the Facebook platform itself, Facebook's API allows third party websites to integrate it into their own offer in the form of a social plugin (Facebook, 2012a, Part I, Item1. Business). This way, users can recommend external content to their friends within the network (Ellison & boyd, 2013), a feature becoming increasingly popular for advertizing purposes and to trigger viral processes (Garety, 2013), as will be outlined later. The *like*-feature has become very significant for users, as suggested by user statistics: From 2009 to 2012, 1.13 trillion *likes* have been made (Facebook, 2012b), the number has increased from 2.7 to approximately 4.5 million *likes* per day (August 2012 to May 2013, Facebook, 2013g).

Not only other user-generated and external content, but also Facebook Pages, usually created by and representing brands or organizations, can be *liked*. This way, their content is being connected to a user's profile. This oft-used possibility for social media marketing will be outlined in the following.

2.3 Facebook Pages for Social Media Marketing

2.3.1 Facebook's Potential for Social Influence: eWOM and Viral Processes

Against the background of what was outlined regarding the social graph and the open graph in chapter 2.2.2, Facebook has laid the groundwork for new ways of social influence among Internet users (Fogg, 2008). The technological possibilities and the structure of social networking sites allow for what Fogg (2008) as well as Weiksner, Fogg and Liu (2008) named mass interpersonal persuasion (MIP), describing new ways for social influence leading to changes in attitude and behavior arise that are characterized by a pace, bandwidth and potential impact that exceed processes we know from face-to-face contexts. It is thus no surprise that, according to Chuan and Yoojung (2011 in Svensson, 2011), Facebook has become an arena for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), defined as

“Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004, p. 39)

Connections among users create a huge potential reach with elements of trust in real-life connections (Svensson, 2011). Furthermore, interactive applications and possibilities for sharing and spreading eWOM and original content have become easy and numerous (Svensson, 2011). Or, as Svensson (2011) puts it: „Facebook eWOM is delivered on a silver plate“ (p. 9). Consequently, more and more marketers have been actively trying to bring their content onto the Facebook platform and to make use of the possibilities described above.

2.3.2 Use of Social Media for Marketing Purposes

The term *social media* for digital technologies that allow for certain social mechanisms is often used in marketing contexts and refers to

„the media that describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers with the intent of educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues“ (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004, p. 2 in Park, Kim, Kwon & Song, 2012).

The concept of social media thus stresses the potential for marketing purposes.

Non-profit organizations were the first to make use of social media for advertizing and public relations purposes, even before academic institutions (Butcher, 2009 in Shin et al., 2012). Since then, the use of social media as a marketing tool has constantly increased over the years. For example, in 2008 43% of organizations in America reported they had integrated social media into their marketing mix, while already 73% claimed to have done so in 2010 (eMarketer in Park et al., 2012). A survey conducted in late 2012 by Vizu, a Nielsen company (Nielsen, 2013), suggests a further growth, as none of the surveyed advertisers claimed not to use social media, while only 6% of agencies did not use social media. Among those who did, 89% of organizations (and 71% of agencies) reported using free tools such as a twitter account, a Youtube channel or – most relevant to the present research – a Facebook Page. Paid methods (e.g. promoting Facebook Pages, posts, or external websites) were reported to be used by 75% of organizations (and 81% of agencies).

Due to its prevalence and success, Facebook in particular is frequently being used for social media marketing. In 2013, Facebook reported over 1 million advertisers (paid advertizing, Facebook, 2013d) and 50 million Facebook Pages with ten or more *likes* at the end of 2012 (Facebook, 2012a). Facebook Pages, as a free method for creating a brand or organizational presence on Facebook, can be used for different purposes, depending on the organizational strategy (e.g. monitoring, branding, customer service, consumer relations, recruiting etc; Bernecker & Beilharz, 2012). For the purpose of the present research, organizational strategies for Facebook Pages are of less interest; hence this aspect will not be described further. It is, however, crucial to outline what Facebook Pages are exactly and the mechanisms by which they can be used to trigger viral effects, in other words: What potential do they hold for social influence processes among users?

2.3.3 Facebook Pages

In 2007, Facebook opened up the profile feature to non-private persons, so-called Pages (Hönisch & Strack, 2012). In 2009, a Page was defined by Facebook as “a public profile that enables you to share your business and products with Facebook users” (Facebook, 2009 in Shin, Carithers, Lee, Graham & Hendricks, 2012, p.3). In 2012, Facebook specified the target group for Facebook Pages and stressed the potential for engaging with customers: „Pages are public profiles that enable public figures, businesses and other organizations to create an online presence and engage with individuals on Facebook” (Facebook, 2012 in Hönisch & Strack, 2012). In 2013, the latter aspect was still part of the most recent definition provided by Facebook: “Your Page is the central place to grow your business, build your brand and develop relationships with your customers.” (Facebook, 2013b).

To this day (July 2014), Facebook Pages are not just limited to commercial businesses, non-profit organizations or public figures - Facebook also provides categories for places, environmental or social causes and entertainment (Facebook, 2013b). Hence, even ideas, values and notions can be represented by a Facebook Page. Still, their original purpose seems to have been to provide a space for marketers within the SNS. For organizations and businesses, creating a Facebook Page is described as the first step for advertizing on Facebook, after which advertisers are advised to connect with fans, to increase engagement by posting content and to use the social graph to influence friends of their fans (Facebook, 2013a).

At this point, the aspect of posting engaging content along with the actual information contained within a Facebook Page will only be briefly outlined, as it is not central to the present research. Since switching the Page's layout to the Timeline (just like personal profiles, as outlined above) in March 2012 (Axon, 2012), Facebook Pages provide advertisers with the opportunity to integrate a header, an about section, and the possibility of including self-created apps and social applications like Youtube and Instagram (Flynn, 2012), as illustrated in Figure 3. Furthermore, organizations can post status updates (just like users do on personal profiles). These status updates may contain textual information, links, photos, or videos (Shin et al., 2012). In a qualitative content analysis of Facebook Pages from the Forbes Fortune 500 companies list of 2010, Jae-Hwa Shin and colleagues (Shin et al., 2012) revealed a prevalence of interest-themed (e.g. the respective product or service) textual posts for brand promotion and promotion of news and events. The importance of creating and posting engaging content (that triggers customer reactions, such as commenting, *liking* or sharing) on Facebook Pages becomes clear when looking at the algorithm Facebook uses to filter content within a user's News Feed (the so-called EdgeRank algorithm; Cooper, 2013): Here, the interaction rate (how often a user has *liked*, shared or commented on a page's content) determines to a large extent whether a post will be presented to users connected with a Page in the first place. Hence, persuading users to interact with a Page's content is crucial for marketing purposes. But before being able to engage users, Page operators have to build a potential audience (the second step in Facebook marketing mentioned earlier) to begin with: Users have to connect to a Page, become a fan or – as it is called nowadays – *like* the Page.

2.3.4 Liking a Facebook Page

Originally, Facebook Pages provided the option of *becoming a fan*, which was replaced by the term *like* (parallel to the *like*-button for other users' content) in 2010 (WhatIs, 2010). *Liking* a Page can fulfill different purposes: Apart from receiving the Page's status updates in one's own News Feed,

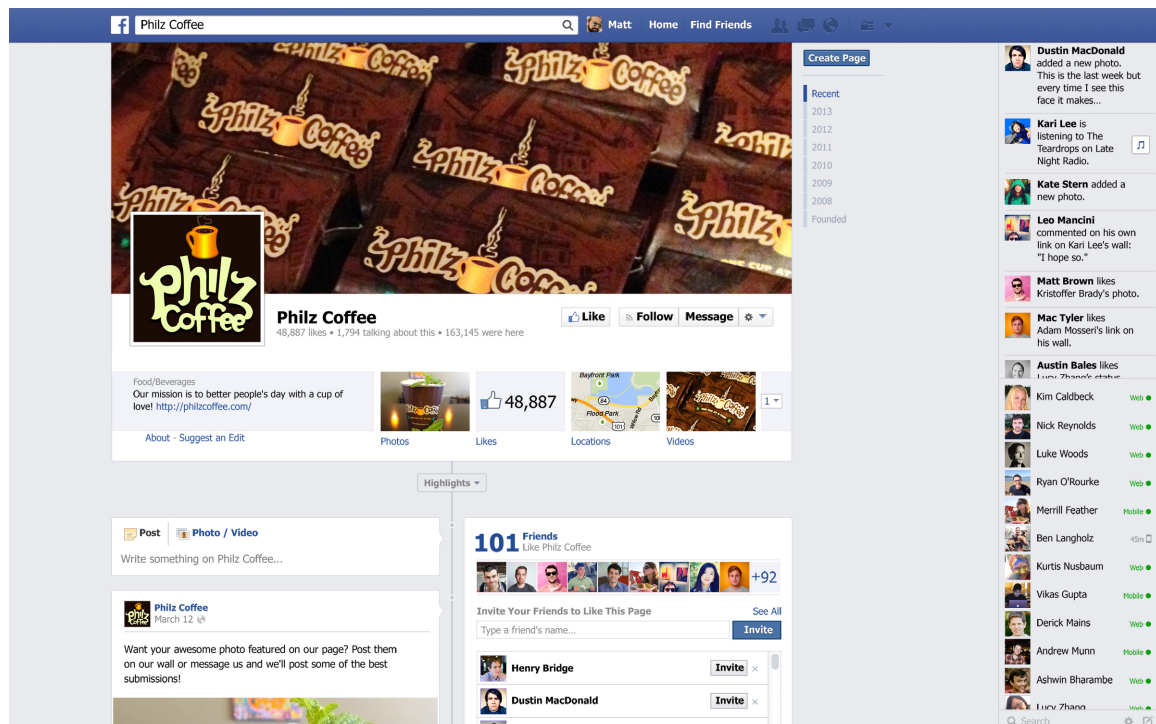


Figure 3. Facebook Page (Facebook, 2014)

users can “openly express a connection between themselves and that brand” (Hönisch & Strack, 2012, p. 13) by *liking* a Page (which does not only apply to brands but also causes, organizations and other Page operators). *Liking* a page suggests a positive evaluation of the respective brand or organization (Shin et al., 2012). In line with that, being a fan of a brand on Facebook has been found to correlate with brand identification (Hönisch & Strack, 2012). In this respect, *liking* a page is considered to represent a positive form of eWOM for the respective cause based on the definition by Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004, p. 39 in Svensson, 2011, see chapter 2.3.1), although no textual message is included.

Once a connection between a user and a Page is established, it is visible to other users. After a user has *liked* a Page, the connection is visibly added to their Timeline in the respective category (e.g. Sports, Music, Movies...), as observed on Facebook (2014).

Furthermore, the user’s friends can see the respective action within the News Feed (WhatIs, 2010). This way, it is assumed that users who *like* a page may exert social influence within their social network, as Facebook advises marketers to promote these activities accordingly (Facebook, 2013a). Indeed, information about other users’ *like*-behavior may be very omnipresent during browsing activities. The following section will provide an overview of possible ways of displaying users’ *likes* (connections to Pages).

2.4 Ubiquity of User-Page Connections

New *likes* are added immediately to a *like*-display on the respective brand Page (observed on Facebook in September 2013). Here, the total number of fans/*likes* is given. In addition, any user seeing a Page will be presented with a variable number of friends who have already *liked* the Page (if such connections exist) along with the respective profile photo (Figure 3).

As suggested in the previous section, the action of *liking* a Page will also be visible to connected users within their News Feed (observed on www.facebook.de in December 2014).

Ads are one way of actively promoting Facebook Pages. This is a way to try and influence friends of a Page's fans, as suggested by Facebook (Facebook, 2013a). Targeting friends of existing fans with an Ad will also reveal some of these fans (who are connected to the person confronted with the Ad), either by name or profile photo, depending on the placement (observed on www.facebook.de in December 2014). Figure 2 illustrates the possibility for Ads in the upper right corner of the Page.

Another possible method of displaying Facebook connections for promoting Facebook Pages is to use social plugins on external websites (Facebook Developers, 2013). Facebook provides several ways of allowing website visitors to see how prominent the respective brand/organization is on Facebook, e.g. by displaying a *like*-button along with an anonymous counter or by integrating names and photos of the visitors' Facebook friends who have *liked* the respective Facebook Page (if the respective person is logged in on the Facebook platform while browsing the external website).

As already mentioned in the last paragraph, a *like* is not only displayed within other users' News Feed, external websites or on the respective Page; it is also explicitly added to the user's personal profile, either under the *like*-tab or along recent activities (see Figure 1).

2.4.1 Short Summary and Implications

As the outline of the previous sections show, Facebook seems to have huge potential with regard to social influence processes in the context of Facebook Pages, based on different characteristics and features of the environment. Generally speaking, one could say that Facebook as an SNS represents an online environment in which actions made by users are made available to other users, particularly to those within their own network. The link between the profile (to which these actions are associated) and the respective owner (who is not anonymous) as well as connections among users allow for a mapping of real life social networks within an online environment. This so-called social graph together with the technical characteristics of the medium has huge potential to engage

users in different kinds of actions (because of the simplicity, the reach and the basis of trust among connections; Fogg, 2008). Accordingly, displaying the actions of other users (with the focus on a user's own connections) is frequently being used as a means of spreading social influence among the network, not just on Facebook. For example, also Pinterest and Twitter also show how others have engaged with certain content or another user. The respective actions are *pinning* and *following* (observed on www.twitter.de and www.pinterest.de in December, 2014):

The *like*-feature on Facebook is of particular interest to third parties (non-private people). Combined with the feature of Facebook Pages (for which *liking* can represent a positive evaluation and thus positive eWOM), that allows brands and organizations to be represented within the SNS, the mechanisms described above are assumed to lead to viral processes. While browsing the platform, *like*-activities of friends are omnipresent, hence the (technical) preconditions for social influence seem to be perfect. However, against the background of what is known about social psychological mechanisms of social influence, it seems unreasonable to assume that every user will be influenced by these *like*-displays in the same way and that they will inevitably lead to a respective action on the part of the perceiver. For example, one aspect that has to be taken into account is which connections (friends) are displayed. In addition, potential reactions towards *like*-displays may also be private (in the form of attitudes) and public reactions (clicking the *like*-button), which are crucial for viral processes, are very visible across the network and the associated motivations and potential obstacles have to be considered as well. In the following section, the psychological concept of social influence will be introduced, defined and narrowed down for the purpose of the present research (that is, against the background of the features and mechanisms provided by Facebook, as outlined above), before empirical evidence for social influence on SNS (and through the *like*-feature) will be provided, leading to the question which psychological mechanisms might account for them.

Chapter 3

Social Influence

*"Day after day, I saw how Facebook's innovation
would allow persuasion to take place,
from one friend to another, on a massive scale
never before possible" (Fogg, 2008, p. 24).*

The following chapter, which will expound the theoretical background of one of the two major topics of the present research, aims to illustrate the concept of social influence from a social psychological perspective, including theoretical approaches as well as empirical findings. As there are numerous patterns, and consequently definitions of social influence, the first section is meant to narrow down the concept against the background of what was outlined in the previous chapter, suggesting a target-centered approach of group as well as interpersonal processes. The second section will provide an overview of what is known so far about social influence in the context of computer-mediated communication, particularly social network sites. After beginning with an overview of empirical results, the most well-known theoretical approaches to social influence in computer-mediated communication will then be presented. Following the suggestions made by (Fogg, 2008), which are assumed to be appropriate for the present research, the subsequent sections will represent a "step backwards", considering classical theoretical approaches and empirical results on social influence in face-to-face settings. Here, the subject of motives for yielding to social influence is considered to be of significant relevance - suggested for example by Cialdini and Trost (1998) as well as Wood (2000) - as these provide the basis for the subsequent discussion on which aspects affect social influence (anonymity, relationship towards the source, ambiguity of the situation and group size). The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the presented concepts and results which are applied to the Facebook environment for the purpose of the present research.

3.1 Conceptualizing Social Influence for the Purpose of the Present Research

There exist multiple patterns, and accordingly various definitions, of social influence which are comprised of both different foci and different processes. In 1985, Allport defined the area of social psychology itself as “an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others” (p. 3 in Turner, 1991). This definition suggests several characteristics of social influence as a central subject of social psychology, for example that behavior as well as cognitions and emotions can be altered and that others do not necessarily have to be present to exert social influence. A similar, but more narrow definition, aimed at covering the concept of social influence alone, was provided by Hewstone and Martin (2012): a “change of attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values and behavior as a result of being exposed to other individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values and behavior” (p. 271). Here, the influencing agent is described as one or more individuals and based on the fact that *like*-displays may show single individuals as well as whole groups of users (see chapter 2.4), it seems appropriate to use a broader conceptualization of the source. Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) for example also considered this issue when defining conformity (a result of social influence) as „the act of changing one’s behavior to match the responses of others“ (p. 606). This definition is less restrictive regarding the nature of the influencing agent. Furthermore, it focuses on the target (or conformist) rather than the influencing agent.

For the current purpose and against the background of what was outlined in the previous chapter, a conceptualization of social influence is proposed that comprises the following characteristics:

- a) the influencing agent does not have to be physically present

Regarding interaction on Facebook as a form of computer-mediated communication implies that interaction partners are physically isolated from one another (Sassenberg, 2011), communication may often be asynchronous (see chapter 2.1). Hence, an influencing agent is assumed not to be physically present while exerting social influence. However, his/her/their presence may be imagined or implied, as suggested by Allport in 1985 (in Turner, 1991).

- b) the influence is incidental

Incidental influence (Hewstone & Martin, 2012) describes how „people are influenced by the presence or implied presence of others, although there has been no explicit attempt to influence them“ (p. 236). This approach seems appropriate for the current situation, because to exert social influence

through the display of *likes*, the influencing agent(s) are neither required to have an intention nor be aware of the influence process at all. In contrast to this, deliberate social influence, usually known as persuasion (Hewstone & Martin, 2012) requires intention by the influencing agent. Persuasion, or persuasive communication, can be understood as the attempt to make people change their existing attitudes and beliefs (Turner, 1991). The concept often focuses on the message itself (e.g. argument quality, Wood, 2000) or on persuasive techniques that can be applied to influence others (e.g. Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Here, the focus is on the target of social influence rather than the message or the intention of the influencer, because the message (a *like*) is consistent.

c) the focus is on the target rather than the influencer

As mentioned above, different definitions and forms of social influence may focus either on the influenced person (the target) or the influencing agent. For example, Kiesler and Kiesler (1970) describe conformity as a concept that focuses on the target, while persuasion focuses on the influencer (see last section). A focus on the target and his/her motives seems appropriate here, because – as already mentioned in the last paragraph – the influencing agent (other users who are presented in a *like*-display) are not necessarily aware of their role in the process. In a review of social influence research and theories face-to-face (FTF) and in CMC, Kim (2013) describes how the target has gained increasing attention in research, implying that conformity may serve the respective individual's goals. Hence, conformity (yielding to social influence) is not regarded as an unconscious, passive process but an active decision. Consequently, as Cialdini and Trost (1998) suggest, research is required to focus on why people decide to yield to social influence. In consideration of this, the term conformity will mainly be used in the following chapters, to stress the focus on the target rather than the influencer.

d) the influencing agent may be a group or a single individual

The last aspect considered relevant to the current situation is that *like*-displays may show different constellations of people, depending on whether (and if so, how many of) a user's own connections are displayed and how they are related. Hence, it is assumed that group as well as interpersonal processes may be of relevance here. A lot of research on conformity focuses on a majority situation, implying that the number of influencing agents is larger than the number of targets (Campbell & Fairey, 1989). The concept of a group however not only refers to the number of influencing agents but also to a collection of individuals which has psychological implications for the target (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). These two approaches to social influence (interpersonal and group influence) represent two lines of social psychological research, originating in the early 20th century (Prislin & Wood, 2005): While American researchers apparently focused on interpersonal processes, European

research introduced concepts for influence within groups (e.g. the social identity theory, which will be described later; Prislin & Wood, 2005). Depending on the situation, a different self-concept is likely to become salient, bringing aspects of the personal, interpersonal or social self into focus (Brewer & Gardner, 1996 in Knoll, 2013). Social influence in groups is regarded as dependent on the respective group norms and on an individual's relationship towards that group, while interpersonal influence is based on the characteristics of interpersonal relationships (e.g. trust) (Sassenberg, 2011). One aspect which needs to be considered is that two different kinds of groups can be distinguished: common bond and common identity groups (Prentice, Miller & Lightdale, 1994). While common bond groups are represented by interpersonal bonds (friendships) among group members, common identity groups emerge from a common cause or interest (Prentice et al., 1994). Hence, even in a group context, interpersonal bonds may be relevant for conformity processes. In CMC, online communities may also represent common bond or common identity groups, depending on how the community emerged and why (Sassenberg, 2002; Utz & Sassenberg, 2002). Social influence processes might differ accordingly (Sassenberg, 2002). Social networks on SNS can be described as founded on common bonds rather than a common identity, based on Ren et al. (2007) conceptualization of online communities. However, as *like*-displays are multifaceted, in that either individual personal contacts are shown or only an anonymous number of overall *likes* (in which case interpersonal bonds are not detectable), it cannot be determined at this point, which processes may be applicable in which situation. Hence concepts from both lines of research will be presented here.

Given the background of the characteristics outlined above, the following definition of conformity (based on other definitions presented earlier) is suggested for the purpose of the present research:

Social influence in the form of conformity describes the act of altering one's attitudes or behavior to match those of others (single or several individuals or groups) as a result of being exposed to their attitudes or behavior. This exposure may be mediated (e.g. via CMC) and the influencing agent(s) need not be physically present or aware of the process.

3.2 Social Influence in Computer-Mediated Communication

At the time of writing, a lot of studies on eWOM and conformity on SNS (or in settings similar to those of the present research) settle for proving the occurrence of conformity, while few investigate the respective mechanisms in more detail. The following section will provide an overview of empirical results on social influence in CMC. It will concentrate on those studies that employed a situation

similar to that of *like*-displays on Facebook and include incidental influences and a focus on other users' evaluation of a topic in the form of ratings or simple comments, regardless of argument quality. Furthermore, the few studies which have already considered the Facebook environment and its potential for social influence in different ways will also be presented.

3.2.1 Empirical Findings

In 2007, Edwards, Edwards, Qing and Wahl conducted an experiment on the impact of user evaluations on the social rating platform *ratemyprofessor.com*. After watching a video of a lecture, users were asked to rate the respective lecturer's performance in terms of credibility and attractiveness, the appeal of the lecture and their own learning motivation. Before the video was presented, participants were shown the *ratemyprofessor.com* profile page of the respective lecturer, which displayed either positive or negative user evaluations (statistical ratings as well as compatible comments). In addition, a control group was set up which had not seen any user ratings. The results showed the user evaluations seen on the *ratemyprofessor.com* pages affected all dependent variables.

Walther, DeAndrea, Kim and Anthony (2010) manipulated the valence of the user comments that accompanied anti-marijuana PSAs on Youtube. The participants' attitude towards the PSA varied depending on whether the comments were positive or negative. However, their attitude towards the subject of the PSA - the risk of drug use - was not exclusively affected by the comments. Taking into account the level of identification with the group of commenters as a moderator, a significant effect could be observed; indicating that the attitude towards drugs was in line with the valence of the comments when participants identified with the group of commenters.

A more recent study that dealt with a mechanism similar to the *like*-feature on Facebook was a large-scale randomized experiment conducted and presented by Muchnik et al. (2013). On a social news aggregation website, where users submit and discuss online news articles, user comments can be evaluated via an up-vote or down-vote, resulting in an aggregated score for each comment (sum of up-votes minus the sum of down-votes) that is displayed along with the respective comments' content. Muchnik and colleagues randomly assigned about 100,000 newly (user-)generated comments to one of two treatment groups: up-treatment (comment received 1 up-vote right after creation) or down-treatment (comment received 1 down-vote right after creation). The control group did not receive any manipulated votes. The manipulated comments were then rated 310,000 times by other platform users. Results showed that an up-treatment increased the probability of a subsequent positive rating by 32% (in comparison to the control group). With regard to the down-treatment, Muchnik and colleagues observed that it not only increased the probability of subsequent down-votes

but also that of subsequent up-votes, the latter effect being even stronger. This way, the tendency towards conformity (elicited by the first down-vote) was overridden by a tendency to compensate for negative votes. At the end of the study, the final ratings of the down-treated comments did not differ from those of the control group. In addition to the main effect of treatment, Muchnik and colleagues made use of the fact that on the news aggregation website, users could indicate a positive or negative relationship towards other users (by naming them friends or enemies). Incorporating this into the analysis showed that friends of the commenters whose comments had been manipulated were more likely to show the behavior described above (positive herding when a comment was up-voted, compensating down-votes), while enemies were far less likely to be affected by the experimental manipulation.

There is one study which was concerned with social influence on Facebook and the respective psychological mechanisms and which did not focus on the *like*-feature in particular, but used a single video post as a stimulus to elicit conformity. However, it is included in this review because of its focus on psychological mechanisms potentially accounting for conformity within the Facebook environment. Knoll (2013) confronted participants with a mock-up Facebook profile, on which the respective owner had posted a video about a new and largely unknown product. He randomly varied the information given about the profile owner, aiming to persuade participants that they either did or did not have a collective connection to that person or that they had or did not have an interpersonal connection to that person (a 2x2 between subject design plus control condition). Using an existing interpersonal connection, the profile owner was described as a young professor whom participants (students) knew, while the no interpersonal connection condition showed the profile of another professor who was unknown to participants. To manipulate the collective connection, the profiles showed either the logo of the university (with which participants were also associated) or that of an organization unfamiliar to the participants. Overall, the collective connection was found to be effective in terms of social influence, affecting participants' purchase intention and intention to share the video, while the manipulation of an interpersonal bond did not show any effects.

A similar setting was used in a field experimental approach by Hagen and Hofmann (2013). Colleagues of the researcher posted eWOM (for different battery brands) on Facebook, assessing perceivers' recall of the brand and respective attitudes by comparing those who had seen the stimulus with those who had not. While they did not find any effect in regard to product attitude, they did observe that the frequency of using the Facebook News Feed, tie strength as well as interaction frequency between the respective users (target and influencer) increased the effect of the stimulus on brand recall.

The first of the studies presented here that explicitly focuses on the effects of Facebook *like*-displays is a laboratory experiment presented by Bak and Keßler (2012). Confronting participants with neutral mock-up Facebook photo posts, they experimentally varied the number of *likes* the post had already received. Results showed conformity effects for those participants who used Facebook frequently, as they evaluated the picture more favorably.

Also in 2012, Bond and colleagues published the results of a large-scale randomized controlled field experiment conducted on Facebook in 2010 (during the congress elections in the U.S.), which employed a social plugin (see chapter 2.4) regarding a feature very similar to the *like*-button. The 61 million participants of the experiment were presented with a message on Facebook that invited them to vote. The message contained the call to action along with a link to a website that provided information on where to vote and a button that said *I voted*, which users could click. If they did so, the *I voted*-button was displayed in their own profile. This message was presented in two different versions; the informational message was presented as described above while the social message also contained a display that showed how many users had already clicked the *I voted*-button along with profile photos of friends (Facebook connections) who had done so. A control group did not receive any message. Bond and colleagues assessed three different dependent variables: clicking the *I voted*-button (as an indicator of political self-expression, only available to the experimental groups), clicking the link (as an indicator for the need to gain more information about the topic, only available to the experimental groups) and the actual voting behavior (obtained by matching Facebook information with voter information). Results indicated that the social message was more persuasive than the informational message regarding all three dependent variables, suggesting that the people shown in the *I voted*-display exerted social influence. Furthermore, strong ties (defined by interaction frequency on Facebook) were more influential than weak ties. The latter were found to affect political self-expression (clicking the *I voted*-button), but not actual voting behavior.

The final study to be presented here is another field experiment, conducted in Sweden (Egebark & Ekström, 2011). It is concerned with the influence of *like*-displays on Facebook and is thus very similar to the current setting. The researchers manipulated 44 neutral, non-controversial status updates of five associates on Facebook, assigning each post randomly to one of three treatment groups: The status update received 1 *like* from an unknown user, 3 *likes* from unknown users or 1 *like* from a peer (a close tie among one's own connections, based on degree centrality). Status updates in the control group were not manipulated. Results showed that a single *like* made by an unknown person did not affect participants' own *like*-behavior compared to the control condition. By contrast, both the three *likes* from unknown users and the single *like* from a strong tie affected participants' willingness to *like*

the post themselves. Regarding the impact of the peer's *like*, the target's level of activity on Facebook was found to increase the effect.

3.2.2 Methodological Considerations

The studies presented in this section are meant to provide an overview of current research on conformity on Facebook or in similar settings. To summarize, a lot of studies found that indicators of conformity processes were triggered by other users' behavior and evaluations, using two different basic methodological approaches: laboratory and field experiments. While the latter allow for an observation of influence processes in a natural setting, those presented here are limited with regard to the investigation of psychological mechanisms. Or as Shang and Croson (2009) put it: "While one can demonstrate that an effect exists, it is much harder to conclude why." (p. 1435). Accordingly, the field experiments presented here only allowed for the investigation of factors that can be determined via social network analysis, such as tie strength (Bond et al., 2012; Egebark & Ekström, 2011; Hagen & Hofmann, 2013; Muchnik et al., 2013) and frequency of Facebook use (Egebark & Ekström, 2011; Hagen & Hofmann, 2013). Apart from the question to what extent field experiments allow for the investigation of psychological processes, consideration has to be given to the issue of ethical tenability when it comes to eliciting public behavior on Facebook (which e.g. might affect people's reputation or emotional state) from users who are not aware of and have not given their consent to participating in a scientific study (American Psychological Association, 2010; Carlsmith et al., 1976; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie, 2004). Only recently, a study conducted by Facebook Data Science (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014), in which users' News Feed was manipulated in order to investigate the effects on personal mood, caused extensive criticism among psychologists (e.g. Lafrance, 2014) because the methodology was perceived as infringing policies such as those of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie (2004) and the American Psychological Association (2010). In contrast to that, laboratory experiments are more clear with regard to written consent and furthermore, they often allow for a more in-depth investigation of the exact mechanisms and target's motives that lead to conformity, e.g. by employing self-report questionnaires on psychological constructs and mechanisms. The studies outlined here have for example found that identification on a group level plays a role (Knoll, 2013; Walther et al., 2010). However, compared to the field experimental approach, laboratory experiments provide a rather sterile environment, which is limited in predicting field behavior (Harrison & List, 2004).

Given the background outlined in the first chapter, none of the studies conducted up to this point exactly fits the situation with regard to Facebook pages and respective *like*-displays: Either the object

of evaluation was a different one (mostly other fellow users' comments/posts or third party information without an organizational background), the stimulus was different (e.g. a single post instead of a *like*-display) or the mechanisms and/or dependent variables investigated were not exactly comparable to the action of *liking* a Facebook page which would display the subject as part of the user's personal profile. Furthermore, only a few studies have focused on the psychological background of social influence in the context of an established theoretical framework. To fill this gap in research, the following chapter will start by providing an overview of theoretical approaches to social influence in CMC.

3.2.3 Theoretical Approaches to Social Influence in CMC

From research on social interaction in CMC, three major theoretical approaches have emerged so far which provide predictions for the occurrence and mechanisms of conformity in CMC contexts (Kim, 2013): The reduced social cues perspective, the social information processing theory (Walther, 1992) and the social identity model of deindividuation effects (Spears & Lea, 1992). These approaches illustrate a development in how the understanding of CMC regarding its potential for communicating social cues has changed over recent decades. After discussing their potential applicability in the Facebook environment, a fourth theoretical approach is presented which is concerned with influence processes on SNS in particular, namely Fogg's (2008) conceptualization of mass interpersonal persuasion.

The reduced social cues approach (RSC, Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire, 1984 in Spears & Lea, 1992), describes CMC as a medium that does not allow for the communication of social cues that "define the nature of the social situation" (Walther, 1992, p. 56), such as contextual cues (e.g. clothes) and nonverbal behavior. Based on these characteristics, it is often argued that CMC does not provide the necessary preconditions for social influence to occur, if this influence is dependent on the characteristics of the influencer (e.g. attractiveness, credibility, status; Lee & Nass, 2002; Spears & Lea, 1992). Another characteristic of CMC assumed to reduce the potential for social influence is anonymity and physical isolation: According to the RSC approach, these aspects lead to reduced self-regulation and reduced self-awareness which in turn decrease social pressure to yield to social influence exerted by groups, as empirical studies have found behavior in CMC was more extreme and deregulated (Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire, 1984 in Spears & Lea, 1992; Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler & McGuire, 1986; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Some approaches however assume that while the characteristics of CMC shift the attentional focus away from the social context (as no corresponding information is available), the message content itself may become more relevant for

conformity processes (Siegel et al., 1986). Hence, conformity is also assumed to be possible from an RSC perspective, depending on whether it is based on social pressure or informational value – an issue that will be expounded in more detail when discussing motives to conform.

In 1992, Walther suggested an approach to social information exchange within CMC that opposed the prevalent notion of the RSC approach but accounted for developments in CMC which suggested that relational information can be transported via CMC (e.g. online communities or couples meeting online). The social information processing theory (SIPT) proposes that within CMC, relational information is communicated via “nonverbal or verbal, linguistic and textual manipulations” (Walther, 1992, p. 69), e.g. through time cues or acronyms. However, Walther assumed CMC to operate at a different rate than face-to-face communication. Given that interaction partners have enough time to exchange messages and to accumulate personal information, impressions formed via CMC are assumed (and have been found) to be even stronger than those in face-to-face contexts (Walther, 1993). Nonetheless this implies that for impression formation to occur in CMC, a certain amount of time is needed. Based on these assumptions, Van der Heide and Schumaker (2013) discuss conditions under which interpersonal judgments are made in contemporary CMC environments and how developers attempt to accelerate impression formation, e.g. by providing cues for credibility via reputation systems.

The third theoretical approach to interaction (and social influence in particular) in CMC is the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE), a framework that has commonly been used for several decades in research to explain group processes in CMC (Carr, 2010). Similar to the social information processing theory, the SIDE model is based on the assumption that, contrary to assumptions made by the RSC approach, social cues are indeed available in CMC (Spears & Lea, 1992). In contrast to SIPT however, SIDE focuses on group rather than interpersonal contexts. This becomes clear when looking at the way that social information (communicated via CMC) is defined: Instead of equating social and interpersonal information, SIDE is based on the assumption that social cues are “cues TO the social, namely information about the participants, the context and particularly social category information” (Spears & Lea, 1992, p. 45). As social category information is less complex than interpersonal information (Tajfel, 1982), it is very prevalent in CMC and communicated more quickly (Culnan & Markus, 1987). For example, a nickname “hofflovergirl90” in an anonymous CMC environment can be a cue towards different social categories: girls, people born in 1990 and David Hasselhoff fans. Based on this, SIDE applies the social identity framework to group processes in CMC, explaining how characteristics of the medium (reduced interpersonal cues and visual anonymity as well as personal isolation) affect group processes and social influence in particular within groups in CMC (Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995). While earlier approaches to anonymity in groups (e.g. large

crowds) suggest that it results in a state of deindividuation and anti-normative, deregulated behavior (LeBon, 1895 in Carr, 2010), studies conducted by Reicher (1984) in an anonymous face-to-face context revealed that in the presence of a salient social identity, people may be even more oriented towards the salient group norm than in non-anonymous face-to-face contexts. In this line of reasoning, deindividuation (caused by anonymity in CMC) does not represent a loss of self but a shift from personal to social self (Reicher, 1984), leading to orientation towards the respective group norm rather than anti-normative behavior. As outlined earlier, social category information can be very easily accessible in CMC, so instead of defining a situation in interpersonal terms, the self and communication partners are more likely to be included in a shared social category (depersonalization) because the focus lies on shared similarities rather than interpersonal differences (Postmes & Spears, 1998). This, along with deindividuation of the self, also causes categorization of the self in terms of the group (Lea, Spears, & de Groot, 2001). How the latter aspect can affect conformity processes is explained in self-categorization theory (SCT), one core theory of the social identity perspective (Hogg, 2001). According to SCT, the self-categorization process is the basis for social influence within groups, because we perceptually assimilate ourselves to our in-group (Hogg, 2001). SCT and its underlying psychological motives will be discussed in detail later when talking about motives for yielding to social influence (chapter 3.3.2). At this point, it is important to note that SIDE proposes a salient social identity in a state of visual anonymity to strengthen conformity behavior in CMC. SIDE has received a lot of empirical support over recent decades (e.g. Spears et al., 1990; Spears, Postmes, Lea, & Watt, 2001). But the strict preconditions of the model have been subject to criticism because this way, a large amount of CMC interaction (that does not meet these conditions) is neglected (e.g. Walther & Carr, 2010). Further criticism of the model referred to its focus on visual (in contrast to e.g. personal) anonymity (Carr, 2010; Lee, 2006; Tanis, 2003): On the one hand, results exist that show personal anonymity can also affect depersonalization processes (Merola & Hancock, 2009) and on the other hand, this again reduces the amount of imaginable interaction situations where the SIDE model is applicable to a minimum. Hence, although the model received a lot of empirical support, it is difficult to replicate these preconditions across different situations, such as the Facebook environment (e.g. Ganster, 2011).

To summarize, all three approaches to interaction in CMC and their implications for social influence focus on CMC environments and communication situations in which users are visually and/or personally anonymous and interaction partners are unknown to each other at the beginning. „Social influence (in CMC and beyond) involving participants who have known each other for a while – which certainly makes up most of the actual communication – has rarely been studied“ (Sassenberg, 2011, p. 71). As Facebook represents an environment in which users communicate with existing (strong

and weak) ties and are visually as well as personally represented in various ways (profile, photos), as outlined in chapter 2.2.1, it is questionable whether the boundary conditions (Walther, 2009) for applying these theories are met here. For example, Knoll (2013) also assumes that applying SIDE to SNS is inappropriate. To find an approach towards new forms of communication in which online sources are yet to be defined, Walther et al. (2011) suggest conceptualizing online sources in terms of well-established concepts from face-to-face contexts and testing their applicability within the respective CMC environment.

A similar approach is undertaken by Fogg and colleagues when embedding well-established concepts from social influence research within a technological context which, as initially described, is assumed to allow for social influence to spread among a large network (Fogg, 2008; Weiksner et al., 2008). This phenomenon is described as mass interpersonal persuasion (MIP). Coming from the integration of third party applications on Facebook and aiming to describe how they have changed interaction (Fogg, 2008), MIP describes several mechanisms through which social influence is assumed to spread on Facebook, using the automatic structure and social connections within the SNS: “Day after day, I saw how Facebook’s innovation would allow persuasion to take place, from one friend to another, on a massive scale never before possible” (Fogg, 2008, p. 24).

The core of MIP is the persuasive experience which results in a change of behavior or attitudes, not only in terms of using a feature but also with regard to giving away personal information or purchase behavior (Fogg, 2008). This is done by making use of classical concepts of persuasion in face-to-face contexts when designing applications, such as “compliance of many types (direct requests, moral appeal, deceit, etc.), ingratiation as outlined by E. E. Jones (giving compliments, conforming to others, presenting self, and rendering favors) [...]” (Fogg, 2008, p. 26). Consequently, applications may for example employ patterns that encourage reciprocity, social comparison or self-expression (Weiksner et al., 2008). The second aspect that fosters mass interpersonal persuasion is the automated structure of the environment, allowing for simple reactions from the user and, at the same time, a quick distribution across the social network (Fogg, 2008) – similar to that outlined in chapter 2 when discussing Facebook’s potential for eWOM, particularly when considering the *like*-feature.

The concept of MIP focuses on the intention of the creator of an application, and to some extent to that of the distributor (Fogg, 2008), rather than that of the target. Consequently, the patterns of social influence presented in this context focus on the influencing agent and how applications can be designed to be persuasive (e.g. by using the norm of reciprocity) (Weiksner et al., 2008). Since for the current research, the target and his/her motives for conforming are of major interest, the persuasion patterns suggested for MIP cannot be applied unconditionally. However, the general

approach of applying well-established psychological concepts of social influence to investigate (and predict) behavior against the background of mechanisms made possible by the simplicity and spread of actions across the network, seems appropriate for the current research as well. In contrast to MIP, which employs patterns of persuasion from the perspective of the influencing agent, the respective strategy for the current research comprises a discussion of theoretical approaches to conformity from face-to-face contexts and identifying relevant aspects against the background of what was outlined earlier when describing the Facebook environment. The following chapter will provide a framework for social influence (in terms of conformity), including the consequences, goals and aspects that affect conformity.

3.3 A Framework for Social Influence

Research on the phenomenon of conformity goes back to the early 20th century. In 1936, Sherif reported experiments that used the autokinetic effect as an “objectively unstable situation” (p. 91), a principle describing how within a totally dark environment, an immobile point of light seems to move. Participants in the experiments were asked to report how far the point of light had moved, once on their own and once in the presence of others. When participants were alone in the room, individual answers differed considerably. When participants were placed in groups of two or three, a convergence of individual ratings took place (Sherif, 1936). This effect was observed to be even stronger when participants had not taken part in the first treatment (in which they were alone in the room). The established norm and corresponding judgments continued through other settings (e.g. while being asked in the presence of another group or alone, Sherif, 1936), sometimes even for a year after the experiment (Hood & Sherif, 1962; Rohrer, Baron, Hoffman, & Swander, 1954 in Prislin & Wood, 2005). About 15 years later, Solomon Asch conducted a series of experiments (e.g. reported in Asch, 1955) in which participants were asked in groups to judge the length of lines on a card and match one of them with a standard line shown on another card. Only one of the lines to be matched was the same length as the standard line while the others differed substantially (Asch, 1955). Participants were placed in groups of confederates who were instructed to give a wrong answer, although the right answer was clearly evident (Asch, 1955). In this situation, about 37 percent of naïve participants yielded to the opinion of the others, “repudiating the evidence of [their] senses” (Asch, 1955, p. 3). In qualitative interviews, participants stated that they went along with the majority because they did not want to feel alone or different from the group (Asch, 1952; 1956 in Turner, 1991). These two approaches differ with regard to the ambiguity of the situation (Allen, 1965 in Turner, 1991), which presumably leads to different processes of social influence (Turner, 1991). While the

experiments conducted by Asch suggest that people conformed in order to avoid rejection and being compromised (Asch, 1952; 1956 in Turner, 1991), Sherif (1936) suggested that a norm among several people served as evidence about reality when the latter was ambiguous. As the effect observed by Asch decreased when the group was not present and answers were given anonymously (after learning of the confederates' judgment) (in Turner, 1991), it can further be assumed that participants were not really convinced of the opinion they publicly advocated (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In contrast to this, the effect observed by Sherif (1936) lasted over a year and across different situations (Hood & Sherif, 1962; Rohrer, Baron, Hoffman, & Swander, 1954 in Prislín & Wood, 2005). These two early experiments on conformity illustrate that yielding to social influence can be based on different motivational processes, may result in different consequences and is dependent on different situational characteristics. The following chapter aims to present a framework for social influence (in terms of conformity) which elaborates on these aspects. First, different reactions to social influence will be outlined in terms of internalization and persistence and after that, potential motives for yielding to social influence will be discussed. Apart from those employed in Sherif's (1936) and Asch's (1955) experiments (accuracy and affiliation, respectively), also the maintenance of a positive self-image and consistency will also be described. Finally, a series of situational factors will be discussed which affect social influence (depending on the underlying goal), such as anonymity, the relationship towards the source, ambiguity of the situation and the number of influencing agents.

3.3.1 Consequences of Social Influence: Public Compliance and Private Acceptance

As already illustrated using Asch's and Sherif's studies as examples, conformity can manifest in different ways: A conformist can publicly comply but remain skeptical with regard to the accuracy of the behavior or he/she can truly believe in it (Kiesler et al., 1970). Hence, on the one hand conformity may comprise processes that lead to a genuine attitude change (without the attitude having to be expressed publicly) and on the other hand it may comprise processes that lead to behavior which is not reflected in one's attitude (Turner, 1991). Those processes are not mutually exclusive (Turner, 1991). For example, Nail (1986) described different combinations of superficial behavioral change and genuine attitude change, in which either only one of these two forms occurs or both do so simultaneously. The terminology in this respect is inconsistent across different research approaches (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), but mostly it is agreed that the term compliance refers to a public change in behavior that lacks a genuine change in attitude (e.g. Festinger, Gerard, Hymovitch, Kelley & Raven, 1952; Kelman, 1958; Kelman, 1961; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Nail, 1986; Turner, 1991), while a genuine change in attitude (which may be accompanied by respective behavior; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) is often referred to as private acceptance (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Turner, 1991).

Accordingly, private acceptance is regarded as similar to the process of changing one's attitude as a consequence of persuasive communication (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Private acceptance is assumed not to be dependent on external costs or benefits, consequently changes in attitude and behavior are persistent and other attitudes might even change as well to establish consistency (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In contrast to this, compliance describes a change in behavior (as a consequence of conformity) that is not internalized and which is dependent on external rewards, such as approval from others (Kiesler et al., 1970). Compliance is assumed to cease when the relevant influencing agent is absent or his/her/their subjective importance to the target decreases (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In Asch's experiments, public compliance was assumed to be the outcome of conformity (rather than private acceptance), as the group's evaluation was clearly wrong (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In Sherif's experiments, the resulting attitude persisted across other situations and over time (Hood & Sherif, 1962; Rohrer, Baron, Hoffman, & Swander, 1954 in Prislin & Wood, 2005), hence private acceptance may have been the respective outcome variable.

The process of compliance stresses the behavioral aspect and according to Kiesler and Kiesler (1970), research seldom focused on the respective attitude. However, as the authors point out, the distinction between compliance and private acceptance is not the same as that of behavior and attitude: A behavior can be based on a private attitude and both processes can occur simultaneously. From that, one can infer that observing a behavior does not necessarily imply that it is based on public compliance but that it can also be an expression of a privately held opinion. People who comply and people who privately accept an attitude/behavior are in psychologically different situations (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), which will be subject of the next chapter.

3.3.2 Goals for Yielding to Social Influence

Since the early days of social influence research, the focus has been on the target and his/her motives as a central factor for explaining social influence - for example, Cialdini and Trost (1998), Insko, Drenan, Solomon, Smith and Wade (1983), Kelman (1958) as well as Prislin and Wood (2005) have discussed this aspect. As outlined earlier (chapter 3.1), the basic assumption is that the reaction to social influence (conformity) is goal directed (Prislin & Wood, 2005). However, the existing literature is not consistent regarding which motives or goals for conformity exist and come into play in different studies (Insko et al., 1983).

From the 1950s onwards, a distinction between two basic processes of social influence (representing two different underlying goals for yielding to social influence) has been commonly made in research (Prislin & Wood, 2005; Wood, 2000). This dichotomy is based on a dual process model proposed by

Deutsch and Gerard in 1955 that comprises *normative* and *informational* processes of social influence. Informational influence is assumed to occur when people take the attitudes and opinions of others “as evidence about reality” (Deutsch & Gerard, 1995, p. 629). In contrast to this, normative influence is conceptualized as being based on the goal “to conform with the positive expectations of another” (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955 p. 629). Later approaches also reflect the dichotomous conceptualization of social influence, e.g. Kiesler and Kiesler’s (1970) notion of the *need to be liked* and the *need to be correct*, Jones and Gerard’s (1967) *effect dependence* and *information dependence*, and Kelley’s (1952 in Prislin & Wood, 2005) distinction between the *normative* and *comparative* functions of reference groups. All these approaches share the idea that people conform either to reduce negative feedback from others and maximize approval or to gain information about the nature of reality (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Although this distinction has been commonly applied and shown to be very useful, the boundaries between both processes have not always been clear, as they operate in much the same way and can lead to similar effects (Price et al., 2006). Furthermore, criticism has emerged recently that the dual process model of social influence is inappropriately simplified in various contexts, but in psychology textbooks in particular (Prislin & Wood, 2005). In this respect, Prislin and Wood (2005) find normative influence to have been equated with concern about others’ reactions, ignoring self-related aspects which are for example addressed in social identity theory. According to Prislin and Wood (2005), the aforementioned simplification implies normative influence is solely dependent on the surveillance of others. Instead, they assume that normative processes of social influence are divisible into two (not mutually exclusive) components: Concerns about rewards and punishments others can provide and concerns about the intrinsic value of the relationship towards the source which is connected to a positive self-image (Prislin & Wood, 2005; Wood, 2000). Early models of social influence had already considered this aspect, proposing at least three processes of social influence. Kelman (1958; 1961) suggested a model that, as well as *compliance* (equivalent to normative social influence) and *internalization* (equivalent to informational influence), included a third process which he named *identification* and which is concerned with self-related aspects of the relationship towards the influencing agent. Also around this time, French and Raven (1959) proposed their bases of social power, discussing five components which - according to Kiesler and Kiesler (1970) and Turner (1991) - also comprised aspects of normative influence (*rewards power*), informational influence (*expert power*) and a process based on identification with the source (*referent power*). Although differences exist between these approaches, „at core they all distinguish between aspects of the need to be, the need to relate to others, and the need to understand“ (Prislin & Wood, p. 675). Consequently, current theoretical approaches consist of these three basic motives (e.g. Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Hewstone &

Martin, 2012; Prislin & Wood, 2005). Apart from those motives outlined above, a fourth aspect, the desire to maintain cognitive consistency (Prislin & Wood, 2005), will be incorporated in the present outline. Based on the theory of cognitive dissonance, this aspect represents a cognitive approach, within which attitudes (e.g. towards an object of evaluation or towards the influencing agent) are assumed to become subject to change if they are contradictory (inconsistent). Prislin and Wood (2005) regarded this aspect as prerequisite for other motives for yielding to social influence and thus did not incorporate it into their model. However, for the current research this will be included.

For clarification and simplification, the following table illustrates which theoretical concepts from conformity research (suggested by different authors) are assigned to which goal, based on Kelman (1958; 1961), Insko et al. (1983) as well as Prislin and Wood (2005) (in order of focus in the following chapters).

| Approach | Author | Goal | | | |
|----------------|---|--|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | Accuracy | Affiliation | Positive Self-Evaluation | Cognitive Consistency |
| Not defined | Deutsch & Gerard, 1955 | Informational Influence | Normative Influence | - | - |
| | Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970 | The need to be correct | The need to be liked | - | - |
| Inter-personal | Kelman, 1958, 1961 | Internalization | Compliance | Identification | - |
| | French & Raven, 1959 | Expert Power | Rewards Power | Referent Power | - |
| | Heider, 1946; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955 | - | - | - | Attitude Change |
| Group | Kelley, 1952 | Comparative Function of Reference Groups | Normative Function of Reference Groups | - | - |
| | Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1982) | - | - | Referent informational Influence | - |

Figure 4. Overview of Goals for Yielding to Social Influence and According Theoretical Approaches

3.3.2.1 The Goal of Accuracy

The goal of accuracy (Prislin & Wood, 2005), based on the need to be correct (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), is incorporated within most conceptualizations of social influence, beginning with Deutsch and Gerards (1955) informational influence up to Kelman's (1958) internalization. It describes the need to interpret incoming information correctly (inferred from the behavior of others) and to react accurately in accordance with that (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In this sense, the behavior of others is taken into account in the definition of what is correct (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Kiesler and Kiesler (1970) refer

to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory which suggests that in the case of the impracticality of physical reality testing (when a situation is ambiguous), people tend to carry out social reality testing, inferring evidence about the physical and social reality from the behavior of others. Accordingly, Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) informational influence is described as being based on the desire to gain an accurate view of reality and behave accordingly (Turner, 1991). Yielding to social influence thus serves the purpose of evaluating oneself and others, validating one's own attitudes and opinions and making sure they match those of others (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). A similar construct is the concept of internalization, suggested by Kelman (1958, 1961). Here, it is assumed that an individual accepts social influence because its content (attitude and behavior) is intrinsically rewarding (Kelman, 1958), for example by helping to solve a problem (Turner, 1991). As an example of content that is internalized this way, Kelman (1961) mentions expert recommendations: The content of the influence is perceived as being consistent with the target's own value system (which also includes knowledge structures; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Conceptions regarding the persistence of the consequences of social influence based on the goal of accuracy are similar in both Deutsch and Gerards (1955) as well as Kelman's (1958) approaches. Informational influence is assumed to be *true* influence, leading to private acceptance and thus a genuine long-term change in attitudes and respective behavior (Turner, 1991). As Kelman (1961) described it, behavior resulting from internalization is also adapted into the target's value system. As these attitudes and behavior are independent of the source of influence, they are assumed to persist over a longer period of time (Kelman, 1961; Pennington & Schlenker, 1999 in Quinn & Schlenker, 2002) even when the relationship towards the source is not salient (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

The crucial aspect for the acceptance of social influence when it comes to Kelman's process of internalization is the credibility of the influencing agent, as social influence is dependent on the agent's relationship towards the content rather than that towards the target (Kelman, 1961). Accordingly, studies (in which the goal of accuracy was assumed to be the basis for social influence, Insko et al., 1983) show conformity (assessed by the measurement of public responses) increases when the influencing agents' competency is high, e.g. a group making only a few mistakes before giving a clearly wrong judgment (Di Vesta, 1959 in Insko et al., 1983), or an interaction partner being successful in a previous task (Mausner, 1954 in Insko et al., 1983).

The occurrence and relevance of the goal of accuracy in contrast to other goals was tested in different empirical studies. In 1958, Kelman himself reported an experiment which was based on the assumption that depending on the basis of the influencing agent's power (attractiveness, control, and credibility), a different process of social influence would be triggered (internalization, as well

as identification and compliance, the latter of which will be outlined in the following sections). As stimulus material, Kelman (1958) employed a message from the U.S. Supreme Court on the subject of college attendance for black and white students, with which the participants (African Americans) were generally assumed to disagree. Participants were told different background stories about the message presenter, which increased the respective basis of power (confirmed by manipulation checks). With regard to the process of internalization, the background story was supposed to increase the presenter's credibility (a history university professor). As dependent variables, Kelman assessed in which situations the respective attitude (of the influencing agent) was expressed: publicly and directly after the stimulus was shown (questionnaire 1), anonymously and directly after the stimulus was shown (questionnaire 2), or anonymously and a few weeks after the stimulus was shown (questionnaire 3). Based on the above, an attitude change caused by internalization was assumed to be observable independent of whether the relationship towards the influencing agent was salient and independent of whether the influencing agent was present, hence across all three of the questionnaires described above. Results supported this assumption, as no significant differences between attitude score in all three questionnaires were observable.

A similar approach was undertaken by Kelman again in 1960 (reported in Kelman, 1961). Participants were confronted with a message that announced a new education program. As in the experiment described above, additional information was given to the participants which was subject to experimental manipulation: In one condition, the information referred to the positive opinion of a valued reference group towards the respective subject (role-orientation, aimed to trigger processes of identification) and in another condition, the additional information stressed the relationship between the induced opinions and the participants' personal value system (value orientation, meant to trigger processes of internalization). With regard to internalization (the value-orientation group), results showed a change of opinion directly after the induction, which did not last until the second assessment a few weeks later. Also, results regarding the generalization of attitude change to other contexts were only partly supported. Assumptions regarding the robustness of the induced attitude against contradicting opinions were not supported either. To summarize, while the study conducted in 1958 basically supported the occurrence of internalization (reflecting the goal of accuracy) based on an agent's credibility, results obtained in 1960, when internalization was induced by means of connecting the message content to a target's value system, were not in line overall with the assumptions.

The goal of accuracy can not only trigger conformity, it can also disrupt social influence processes when the corresponding characteristics of the influencing agent or group are inconsistent with that goal. In a study conducted by Lundgren and Prislin (1998, Study 1), about processing and attitude change based on expectancy of interaction, the authors let participants choose information in

preparation discussion on tuition increase to be held later, in which they were supposed to argue against the increase (this discussion never took place). Depending on the experimental conditions, additional information about the aim of the discussion was stressed, supposed to reflect different motives to change one's own behavior in anticipation of an interaction with the influencing agent: The importance of being agreeable, the importance of defending one's own position or the importance of being accurate. After being confronted with their discussion partner's attitude on the issue by being presented with a bogus questionnaire result, participants were asked to indicate their own attitude through a questionnaire in preparation for the discussion, which was ostensibly to be shown to the discussion partner (measure of public attitude). Furthermore, while waiting for the discussion, participants filled out a questionnaire on campus issues which also used an indirect measure of participants' attitudes towards the issue under discussion (measure of private attitude). When pursuing the goal of being accurate, participants expressed a strong (and stable) neutral view on the issue (in comparison to the interaction partner's attitude) (Lundgren & Prislin, 1998), indicating that they resisted yielding to social influence. In a related setting, similar results were obtained by Chen, Schechter and Chaiken (1996): People primed to get to the truth of an opinion subject were unaffected by social influence in comparison to those who were primed with impression motivation. Similarly, Quinn and Schlenker (2002) showed that when participants meant to make correct decisions for a task and were held accountable for those, conformity to the group's (wrong) judgment decreased (in contrast to when they wanted to get along with others).

3.3.2.2 The Goal of Affiliation

The goal of affiliation (based on the need to be liked: Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Insko et al., 1983 or the need to relate to others: Prislin & Wood, 2005) implies "relating to others in a way that successfully regulates the rewards and punishments they can provide" (Prislin & Wood, 2005, p. 675). Just like the goal of accuracy, this aspect is reflected in different conceptualizations of the social influence processes presented here. According to Kiesler and Kiesler (1970), people pursuing a goal of affiliation yield to social influence to avoid rejection by others and to increase acceptance (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) notion of normative influence is based on the desire to please others (Turner, 1991). Kelman's (1958; 1961) concept of compliance (as one of three processes of social influence) implies that the target is hoping for a favorable response from an audience in terms of gaining social rewards or avoiding punishments (Kelman, 1961). Accordingly, the target is assumed to show a behavior that the influencing agent expects or approves of (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Kelman, 1961). This behavior is not shown because the target truly believes in it, but because it is expedient to gain a desired social effect (Kelman, 1961).

In contrast to social influence based on the goal of accuracy, conformity based on the goal of affiliation is assumed to result in short-lived and superficial compliance (see also chapter 3.3.1), as the target only expects a certain reaction from a particular audience (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Accordingly, conformity based on the need for affiliation should only be observable when the target is under surveillance by the influencing agent (Kelman, 1961). Furthermore, conformity based on the goal of affiliation is dependent on the influencing agent having power over those means which the target needs for pursuing this goal (means control, Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In this sense, compliance (in Kelman's terminology) or normative social influence (in Deutsch and Gerard's terminology) has been found to be dependent on the influencing agent's attractiveness, status (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) and the target's affection towards the agent (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

Experiments meant to determine processes of social influence based on different goals were introduced in the last section: For the study during which Kelman (1958) confronted participants with a message from the U.S. Supreme Court on issues of black and white students, compliance was triggered by manipulating the influencing agent's perceived level of means control. As dependent variable, it was assessed under which conditions the induced attitude was expressed. For compliance it was assumed that participants would express the respective attitude only under the surveillance of the influencing agent (questionnaire 1, see previous chapter). This assumption was supported by the fact that attitude scores from questionnaire 1 were significantly higher than those from questionnaires 2 and 3 (which did not differ). In Quinn and Schlenker's (2002) experiment, conformity was found to increase when subjects wished to get along with others who gave a wrong judgment in a task (in contrast to when they wanted to be accurate). In Lundgren and Prislin's study 1 (1998), in the course of which participants prepared a discussion with a person whose opinion on the topic they knew, the goal of affiliation was stressed by indicating that the aim of the discussion was to act agreeably (as opposed to defending one's own position or being accurate). In this particular experimental condition, participants expressed an attitude (privately and publicly) in line with the discussion partner's attitude (in contrast to the other experimental conditions). As this attitude was consistent across private and public assessments, it was assumed to represent evidence that normative social influence can also lead to a genuine change in attitude, because based on the task at hand, the issue was assumed to be cognitively processed in an extensive way.

To detect social influence based on the goal of affiliation, some researchers have settled on the effects of attraction and similarity (e.g. Byrne, 1961 in Insko et al., 1983) as well as the question of whether an evaluation is public (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). But according to Insko et al. (1983), these approaches need to be reconsidered. For example, the effects of similarity on conformity are not to be taken as unambiguous evidence of the importance of the goal of affiliation, as these could also

be explained by balance theories (to be outlined in chapter 3.3.2.4). Furthermore, the approach of detecting the goal of affiliation by varying the publicness of evaluation is also regarded as problematic (Insko et al., 1983). As outlined earlier (in chapter 3.3.1), the distinction between compliance reactions (assumed to result from the goal of affiliation) is not that of public vs. private expression of attitudes (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In addition, Insko et al., (1983) argue that the publicness of a response has often been equated with physical contact with the influencing agent, confounding the effects, e.g. in the studies conducted by Levy (1960 in Insko et al., 1983) and by Argle (1957 in Insko et al., 1983). This aspect will be expounded on in chapter 3.3.3.1, when discussing how anonymity affects conformity.

3.3.2.3 The Goal of Positive Self-Evaluation

The goal of positive self-evaluation refers to what Wood (2000) as well as Prislin and Wood (2000) describe as a second aspect of normative influence (apart from the goal of affiliation), which is associated with self-related issues of the relationship towards the source and comprises “Normative concerns for [...] being oneself as a coherent and favorably evaluated entity” (Prislin & Wood, 2005, p. 675). This aspect has been included in different conceptualizations of social influence processes (outlined earlier), e.g. French and Raven’s (1959) referent power or Kelman’s (1958; 1961) identification.

According to Kelman and Eagly (1965), our self-concept is strongly connected to the attitudes and opinions we hold. If our own opinions and attitudes are in line with those of valued others, our positive self-image is strengthened (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Accordingly, the relationship towards others is evaluated in terms of its relevance for our own self-image (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). The process of identification, proposed by Kelman (1958; 1961) implies that a person adapts his/her behavior to that of another person to maintain a positive, self-defining relationship (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). By implication, the gratifications of identification processes result from the act of conforming itself, because the respective behavior and/or attitudes are associated with a self-defining and desirable relationship towards the influencing agent (Kelman, 1958). Consequently, a change in attitude caused by identification is based on structures that connect the target to the influencing agent rather than on those that connect the influencing agent to the subject of evaluation (Knoll, 2013). A common characteristic of identification and compliance (based on the need for affiliation) is that the reason for changes in attitudes and behavior is not an intrinsic reward (as is the case with internalization (see Kelman, 1958; 1961)). But in contrast to compliance, the target in the process of identification believes in those attitudes he/she adopts because the target does not seek the influencing agent’s

approval (Kelman, 1961). Yielding to social influence based on identification is thus assumed to serve the goal of maintaining a desired relationship and the associated positive self-image (Kelman, 1961). Kelman (1961) describes two possible ways of doing so: Imitating someone who has the desired characteristics or expressing empathy towards another person in reciprocal relationships (e.g. friendships).

While the concept of identification suggested by Kelman (1958; 1961) is mainly concerned with interpersonal processes, also conformity towards a valued group can contribute to a positive self-image (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In the context of yielding to social influence with the goal of positive self-evaluation, Prislin and Wood (2005) mention the social identity theory as a relevant theoretical approach. The social identity framework was mentioned in chapter 3.2.3 as representing the basis for the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE), describing how characteristics of CMC affect social influence processes. The social identity framework itself stems from face-to-face contexts and provides a psychological analysis of behavior within and between groups as well as the related self-concept (Hogg & Tindale, 2005). Originally conceptualized by Tajfel (1974), one of the basic notions of the social identity theory as core theory of the framework is that, apart from a personal identity, a person's self-concept comprises several social identities, the knowledge of being part of one or more certain social groups (Oldmeadow, Platow, Foddy, & Anderson, 2003). Consequently, the group is not regarded as an external source of social pressure (as suggested by Deutsch and Gerard, 1955), but as a part of the self-concept (Oldmeadow et al., 2003). Every person is likely to have several social identities, depending on the number of groups he/she feels a part of, but they may differ in personal relevance and likeliness to become salient (Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004). Depending on the situation and the context (Turner, 1991), the respective salient social identity (including shared attributes that define a person's membership of the group) is assumed to serve as the basis for self-definition (Hogg & Tindale, 2005). Consequently, a person who self-categorizes as part of a group based on a salient social identity draws his/her self-concept from the social context and thus perceptually assimilates him-/herself to the respective group stereotype in terms of attitudes and behavior (self-categorization theory (SCT); Hogg, 2001; Turner, 1991). From a social identity perspective, social influence within groups is thus regarded as being based on self-definition, leading to an internal process of attitude change (Turner, 1987). When determining which motives are associated with this attitude change, one may first consider those motives that lead to self-categorization with a salient group. In social identity theory, two motives have been discussed: Uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2000) and the enhancement of self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), the latter of which is regarded as being associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation (based on Prislin & Wood, 2005). Tajfel and Turner (1979 in Abrams & Hogg, 1988) assume (based on

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory) that individuals strive towards a positive self-concept. The alignment of oneself with positive reference groups (and at the same time distancing oneself from negatively valued groups) serves the purpose of gaining "a satisfactory concept or image of the self" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 4 in Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Accordingly, based on Chaiken, Wood and Eagly (1996 in Pool, Wood & Leck, 1998), Pool et al. (1998) state that "the self-evaluation motives that direct attitude change in these theories can be considered manifestations of a defensive orientation, reflecting recipients' desire to achieve a valued, coherent self-identity" (p. 1).

While Prislin and Wood (2005) regard self-related motives of social influence as being a component of normative social influence (as adopted in this thesis), intragroup influence in terms of social identity theory has also been discussed to contain informational aspects, reflected by the motive for uncertainty reduction mentioned above: According to Turner (1991), the position of the group that serves as the basis for self-categorization is subjectively accepted as valid. Hence, a social identity may provide a frame of reference (Festinger, 1954) for appropriate attitudes and perceptions (Oldmeadow et al., 2003).

Consequences (in terms of persistence) of social influence processes based on the goal of positive self-evaluation differ from those triggered by the goal of accuracy or the goal of affiliation. According to Kelman (1961), the resulting attitude change is not internalized, but dependent on the relationship towards the source. More precisely, this means that while social influence is accepted publicly as well as privately, it only lasts as long as the respective role relationship is salient (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Such a relationship can be salient, even if the source is absent and the target is not under surveillance by the source (Kelman, 1961). Hence, identification as suggested by Kelman is regarded as less permanent than internalization: If the relationship towards the source changes, the attitude towards the subject of evaluation changes as well (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). From a social identity perspective, group influence based on social identification is regarded as leading to a genuine and persistent change in attitude, because the source is initially part of the self-concept (Carr, 2010; Turner, 1991) in the first instance. However, the characteristics are described in a similar way to Kelman: A person may act in terms of a group when alone, as long as the respective social identity is salient (Hogg et al., 2004). By implication, group influence might cease when a different social or a person's personal identity becomes salient.

As mentioned before, influence based on the goal of positive self-evaluation is not dependent on the source being present or the target being under surveillance, neither according to Kelman (1961) nor the social identity theory (Hogg et al., 2004). However, according to Kelman (1961), social influence is dependent on the target perceiving the relationship towards the source as pleasant

and relevant for his/her self-concept. Consequently, attraction may positively affect social influence based on identification (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In line with this, the experiment reported by Kelman in 1958, in which participants were confronted with a message on black and white issues (see previous chapters), found that when the attraction of the presenter was manipulated, the participants' change of attitude lasted across questionnaires 1 and 2. As both were assumed to have been completed under conditions of high relationship salience (the first under observation, the second anonymously) as opposed to questionnaire 3, Kelman (1958) regarded this as evidence that the process of identification was a consequence of the influencing agent being attractive. Similarly, social identity theory also suggests that affection towards the group and its emotional significance affects the likeliness of self-categorization and thus respective social influence processes (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel & deGroot, 2001).

3.3.2.4 The Goal of Cognitive Consistency

The fourth goal for yielding to social influence outlined here is cognitive consistency. As mentioned earlier, Prislin and Wood (2005) regarded this aspect as a prerequisite for other motives. Indeed it seems to be closely associated with the goal of maintaining a positive self-image, as achieving cognitive consistency represents a process of dissolving a negatively perceived tension state of inconsistent cognitions towards a positive internal state (Prislin & Wood, 2005). However, the majority of research on this aspect is based on the theory of cognitive dissonance, often discussing intrapersonal inconsistencies (e.g. when behavior does not reflect attitude; Prislin & Wood, 2005). But as Festinger (1957 in Prislin & Wood, 2005) points out, dissonance can also be caused by interpersonal situations. In line with the current approach, also Wyer and Albarracín (2005) distinguish the goal of cognitive consistency from that of positive self-evaluation.

The origin of this set of theories is Heider's (1946; 1958) balance theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), while other theories represent extensions or specific applications of Heider's work. They all share the notion that cognitive inconsistency creates tension which leads to a motivation for cognitive change (cognitive elements are rearranged to restore balance) to reduce negative affect (Festinger, 1957 in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Heider (1946, 1958) introduced a symbolic language which represented cognitive structures by describing attitudes and their relationships towards other attitudes (in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). According to this, the element P is the perceiver, the person whose cognitions are of relevance (or the target in terms of social influence). The element O is an object or another person, hence the influencing agent. X represents an impersonal entity, an object of evaluation, which might be a

physical object, a social issue or a value. The sentiment relation L represents an attitude that is either positive or negative (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Within a cognitive structure that contains three elements (a target, an influencing agent and an object of evaluation) and respective relationships, imbalance or balance might occur (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993): Agreeing with friends and disagreeing with enemies on an object of evaluation will produce balance (a-d), while disagreeing with friends and agreeing with enemies will lead to imbalance (e-h), see Figure 5.

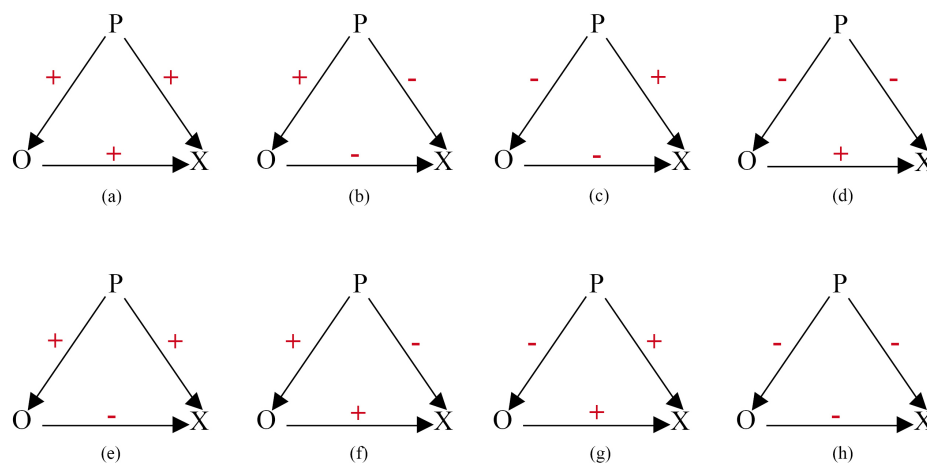


Figure 5. Balance Structures proposed by Heider (according to Eagly & Chaiken, 1993)

Heider (1958) assumed that a state of imbalance will become balanced over time because imbalance leads to negatively perceived tension (in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Several cognitive strategies exist which restore balance (Heider, 1958 in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), but most the important one for the current purpose is attitude change: To restore balance, the target changes his/her attitude either towards the object of evaluation or towards the influencing agent.

Heider's balance theory (1946) can be used to explain how the relationship towards the influencing agent might affect conformity (e.g. done by Sampson & Insko, 1964). However, the principles outlined above cannot be applied in every situation. For example in Asch's conformity experiments, the influencing agents were unknown, hence no prior attitude could be assumed (Insko et al., 1983). Further criticism of Heider's theory refers to the lack of predictions about which strategy for balance restoration (e.g. attitude change) will occur and the strength of prior attitudes not being taken into consideration (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). As a consequence, some extensions of balance theory regard relationships between elements, and thus attitudes, not as a dichotomous but as a continuous variable, for example Osgood and Tannenbaum's (1955) congruity theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Just like Heider's (1946) balance theory, congruity theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) is based on the assumption that there exists a drive for cognitive consistency to be restored via cognitive

changes (e.g. attitude change), although a different vocabulary is used. For example, relations are described as associative (positive) and dissociative (negative) assertions. Congruity theory suggests that inconsistency, and thus the pressure for cognitive change, increases with the strength of prior attitudes, while at the same time stronger attitudes are less likely to be subject to change (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In contrast to the original balance theory, the target is not assumed to change his/her attitude either towards the influencing agent or the object of evaluations; in fact it is suggested that both attitudes are subject to changes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Just like Heider's balance theory, congruity theory does not apply to situations with neutral prior attitudes towards both the object of evaluation and the influencing agent. While the general assumptions of the theory (e.g. that strong attitudes are less likely to change) have received empirical support (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), the exact quantitative predictions have not always been supported in research (e.g. Osgood & Tannebaum, 1955 in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). A recent application in CMC environments (consumer reviews) however has shown that congruity mechanisms can account for social influence from multiple sources to a large extent (Walther, Liang, Ganster, Wohn & Emmington, 2012).

From the aforementioned remarks on balance theories, several aspects that affect social influence have to be taken into account, such as the valence and the strength of the target's prior attitude towards both the influencing agent and the object of evaluation.

Consequences of social influence based on cognitive inconsistency have not, to my knowledge, been discussed in terms of persistence and superficiality. As balance theories are concerned with attitudes in a cognitive way, rather than with behavior, it is hard to make any predictions in accordance with those outlined for other goals earlier. One might assume that superficial compliance as a conformity reaction is unlikely because if a person's behavior and his/her attitude are not in line with each other, that might lead to even more negatively perceived imbalances. At the same time, as the target's attitude towards the object of evaluation is closely connected to the target's attitude towards the influencing agent (similar to the process of identification proposed by Kelman (1958; 1961)), it seems reasonable to assume that attitude change might be temporary; if the target's attitude towards the influencing agent changes, adaptations to attitude towards the object of evaluation might be necessary to restore consistency. In the course of applying congruity theory to CMC, Walther et al. (2012) extended the scheme suggested by Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) to a two-stage model with multiple sources of social influence. In line with the assumptions outlined above, they found indicators that attitude change occurred in two stages and that after introducing additional (partly contradicting) information by a second source, the transitional attitude was adapted again.

3.3.3 Factors affecting Social Influence Processes

Within the aforementioned outline of the goals for yielding to social influence, several aspects that affect social influence processes were mentioned. For example, with regard to studies on social influence online, tie strength has been found to affect the strength of the effect (chapter 3.2.1). Furthermore, depending on which goal is salient, different situational aspects as well as the kind of outcome (chapter 3.3.1) may affect social influence processes (Kelman, 1961). For example, yielding to social influence when the goal of affiliation is salient is more likely when the target is under observation by the influencing agent (Kelman, 1961, chapter 3.3.2.2). When the goal of accuracy is pursued, aspects that concern the influencing agent's credibility in terms of serving as a valid source for the nature of reality can affect the strength of conformity (Allen & Levine, 1971 in Hewstone & Martin, 2012; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1969; see also chapter 3.3.2.1). Just as the goals outlined earlier are based on different theoretical approaches, the discussion of influential factors in the following chapter will also include different perspectives (not just that of Kelman), outlining how anonymity, the relationship towards the source, the ambiguity of the situation and the number of influencing agents affect social influence.

3.3.3.1 Anonymity

To discuss the impact of anonymity as a function of the salient conformity goal, several manifestations of anonymity should first be clarified to avoid misunderstandings and to stress how easily those can represent confounding variables in research: *publicness of evaluation*, *accountability* and *visibility*. First, a response to social influence can be either public or private (independent of the target's true belief). For example, in face-to-face contexts this could be varied by asking people either to speak their opinion out loud in front of others or by asking them to keep it to themselves or write it down (while others are present). Closely related to this *publicness of evaluation* is the question of whether the target is under the *observation* of the influencing agent, indicating that the influencing agent will learn of the target's evaluation in some way. While these two aspects are often associated, the issue of *accountability* can vary in this context. Consequences of conformity can be public and available to the influencing agent; but the conformist can still be unidentifiable and thus *unaccountable* (especially in computer-mediated communication, see chapter 3.2.3). Besides *publicness of evaluation* and *accountability* as manifestations of anonymity, the status of *visibility* also has to be mentioned. Based on SIDE (chapter 3.2.3), visual anonymity in CMC is assumed to make group processes (such as ingroup influence) more likely. This effect is presumably not based on a lack of accountability or

identifiability; but on depersonalization (in the sense of idiosyncratic differences being invisible) and deindividuation (e.g. Postmes et al., 2001).

On Facebook, as a nonymous environment (chapter 2.2), visual anonymity is not common. Hence, the SIDE model is not applicable here. For the same reasons, accountability within the Facebook environment can be regarded as high and stable, which makes conformity under certain conditions more likely: In different studies, accountability (e.g. by providing contact information/real names or by expecting a face-to-face meeting) has been found to increase conformity for public evaluations (Chen, Schechter & Chaiken, 1996; Mouton, Blake & Olmstead, 1956; Sassenberg & Kreuz, 2002; Tetlock, 1983; Tetlock, Skitkar & Boettger, 1989) and particularly when the goal of affiliation was salient (Quinn & Schlenker, 2002). While both *visual anonymity* and *accountability* are regarded as relatively stable characteristics of the Facebook environment (and will thus not be described in more detail at this point), the *publicness of evaluation* may differ, e.g. a user may change his/her attitude in private or may *like* a page, the latter being visible to other users as well.

A lot of empirical studies on this subject used a variation of publicness along with the presence of the influencing agents, finding that a public reaction in face-to-face settings led to more conformity than when the target was anonymous and their judgment was available to the influencing agents (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). For example, Insko et al. (1983) found a main effect for publicness of participants' responses, with subjects showing more conformity when responding publicly. In line with these findings, it is assumed that conformity in general is more likely in public than in private settings because a public evaluation is associated with impression management processes (Baumeister, 1982; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). This makes sense against the background of what was outlined about the goal of affiliation and the assumption that yielding to social influence may serve the purpose of eliciting positive reactions from the influencing agents who observe the respective behavior or expressed opinion.

However, results exist in face-to-face settings that cannot be explained by the goal of affiliation. Findings of a meta review of studies applying the Asch paradigm (Bond & Smith, 1996) suggest that the difference between public and private settings cannot account for observed attitude changes. The effects of publicness of evaluation in settings using the Asch paradigm are assumed to be confounded by those of physical contact with the confederates (Insko et al., 1983). While physical isolation increases private self-awareness (Sassenberg, Boos & Rabung, 2005), the presence of confederates is assumed to heighten objective self-awareness, which in turn increases the likelihood for conformity (Duval, 1976 in Insko et al., 1983). However, according to Insko et al. (1983), the few studies in which these two aspects were not combined and publicness of evaluation was varied while the presence of

confederates was constant (e.g. Mouton et al., 1956) nevertheless suggest that conformity increases when evaluation is public. In 1983, Insko and colleagues specifically aimed to investigate the effects of publicness on conformity, while controlling for confounding variables caused by objective self-awareness by adding a condition in which the participants were recorded by a camera (increasing objective self-awareness). In line with assumptions, results showed that conformity increased when evaluation was public, even without objective self-awareness contaminating this effect.

Apart from accountable situations, publicness of evaluation was found to affect conformity positively even when the target was unidentifiable to the confederates (low accountability) (Lee & Nass, 2002), suggesting that the goal of affiliation cannot entirely account for the effects of publicness. Although many researchers argue about normative concerns being responsible for the effect of publicness on conformity (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), drawing inferences with regard to the underlying motive should be done cautiously, giving consideration to the terminology used (Wood, 2000). „At heart, manipulating social pressure through surveillance suggests an oversimplified view of social impact“ (Prislin & Wood, 2005, p. 674). As outlined in chapter 3.3.2, normative influence processes do not only include a goal of affiliation but also one for a positive self-concept. While in the context of the goal of affiliation a process of conformity (compliance in Kelman's terms) should only be observable under surveillance conditions, the second form of conformity (based on the goal of positive self-evaluation) may also be observable with regard to private evaluations and with no other people present. Furthermore, as outlined earlier, processes of social influence that are based on the goal of accuracy should also be immune to the effects of surveillance by the influencing agent (e.g. Kelman, 1961).

For the purpose of the current research it can be summarized that many studies suggest publicness increases conformity processes (in contrast to a private reaction) in face-to-face as well as computer-mediated contexts. Publicness refers to the type of evaluation, independent of the interaction being mediated, and implies the influencing agent being physically present or the target being identifiable (which is stable on Facebook). However, the effect of publicness of evaluation on conformity strength should be dependent on which goal the process is based: When a need for affiliation is salient, publicness is assumed to affect conformity, while no such effect is expected with regard to processes based on the goals of accuracy or a positive self-image.

3.3.3.2 Relationship towards the Source of Influence

Regarding the relationship towards the source of social influence, several aspects that might affect conformity (depending on the assumed underlying mechanisms) were mentioned briefly when

discussing the goals for conformity earlier. For example, with regard to the need for accuracy, the credibility of the influencing agent was mentioned (chapter 3.3.2.1), while in the context of affiliation goals, means control of the agent was assumed to be relevant, such as the target's affection and attractiveness (chapter 3.3.2.2). When discussing the goal of positive self-evaluation, the relationship towards the source was considered to be particularly crucial, as social influence is assumed to be dependent on this relationship being relevant to the target's self-concept and of emotional significance (e.g. a friend or an in-group, chapter 3.3.2.3). Furthermore, the need for cognitive consistency was concerned with the general attitude towards the influencing agent in terms of valence and strength (chapter 3.3.2.4). In the following sections, several of these aspects will be outlined and empirical results will be discussed accordingly. First, results on how a positive orientation (attitude/attraction) towards the influencing agents will be presented. Furthermore, the aspect of similarity will be discussed against the background of the goal of accuracy. Although it has not been discussed against the background of different motives, tie strength has been found to be of importance for social influence processes for different reasons (e.g. Brown, Borderick & Lee, 2007, see also chapter 3.2.1) and thus will also be considered here.

3.3.3.2.1 Positive Orientation. Positive orientation towards a person or a group has been found to affect conformity processes in various contexts. For example, Kiesler and Kiesler (1970) report the results of a study in which they found the attractiveness of a group was related to social influence (in terms of private acceptance). Dittes and Kelley (1956) also found conformity was stronger when the group eliciting influence was valued by the individual. In addition, Lott and Lott (1961) as well as Festinger et al. (1952) also found a positive relationship between group attraction and conformity towards the group norm. In contrast to this, if a group is disliked, social influence has been found to decrease (Prislin & Wood, 2005).

The aforementioned results are in line with predictions based on the social identity framework that was already introduced in chapter 3.3.2.4). Social identification with a group based on the social identity framework comprises two components: self-stereotyping as part of a group and ingroup attraction (e.g. Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Leach et al., 2008), which in turn are assumed to increase conformity towards that in-group.

The effects of positive orientation (in terms of attitude and attraction, see e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) towards a person or a group on social influence can be explained against the background of several different goals for yielding to social influence. With regard to the goal of accuracy (chapter 3.3.2.1), attraction is often named as a central aspect when it comes to private acceptance (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). The idea is that if the target feels a positive orientation towards the source, social reality testing

is more likely to occur and the more the social influence is internalized (Festinger, 1953 in Insko et al., 1983). In the context of the social identity theory (chapter 3.3.2.3) it has already been outlined that the influence of a group can partly be regarded as being based on the goal of accuracy because the more one self-categorizes with a valued social group, the more the group consensus is regarded as a valid indicator of reality (Prislin & Wood, 2005). However, according to Turner (1991) there are also studies which suggest that group cohesiveness is not always relevant for informational social influence and that sometimes it does not matter whether a stranger or a friend serves as the frame of reference. It can further be assumed that positive orientation towards a person or a group increases means control of that agent in terms of him/her/them being able to punish and reward the target (e.g. through rejection) when the goal of affiliation is pursued (chapter 3.3.2.2). With regard to the goal of positive self-evaluation it has already been mentioned that the value and personal relevance of the self-defining relationship towards the influencing agent is of central importance for social influence (chapter 3.3.2.3). The effects of attraction and positive attitude towards the source on social influence processes can also be explained from the perspective of the goal of consistency (chapter 3.3.2.4). Here, a previous positive attitude is assumed to change the target's attitude towards the object of evaluation in accordance with that attitude, while a negative attitude is assumed to trigger opposing effects.

3.3.3.2.2 Similarity. In the context of social identity theory and the goal of positive self-evaluation (chapter 3.3.2.3) it was discussed that increased perceived similarity within a group leads people to show more conformity (particularly when idiosyncratic differences are hidden such as in anonymous CMC). This phenomenon has also been observed in face-to-face situations and interpersonal contexts (Turner, 1991). In 1968, Hornstein, Fisch and Holmes found that people were more likely to follow the request to return a wallet they found on the street if the owner was like them (a fellow American) as opposed to when the owner was not perceived as being similar (a foreigner). In group contexts, Gerard (1954) observed more social influence when group members shared the same characteristics. Furthermore, Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, and Turner (1990) found that participants conformed more to those confederates who were categorized as students from the same program (as opposed to a different program).

From the perspective of the goal of accuracy (chapter 3.3.2.1), the effects of similarity can be explained against the background of referent informational influence (Turner, 1991). As outlined earlier (chapter 3.3.2.1), perceived similarity within a group leads to depersonalization and adaption towards the in-group stereotype because the peer group members serve as a frame of reference for what can be regarded as valid and accurate (what Festinger called social reality testing, according to

Turner, 1991). People are more likely to compare their attitude and behaviors with that of their peers (Festinger, 1954). Accordingly, when it comes to judgment tasks, similar others may serve as a frame of reference because of the perceived similarity (Turner, 1991). Furthermore, when talking about group processes, similarity between group members is associated with self-categorization to a group which in turn is associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation (chapter 3.3.2.3). Hence, effects of similarity might be ascribed to that goal as well.

3.3.3.2.3 Tie Strength. Tie strength is a multidimensional construct that can be described by indicators and predictors (Marsden & Campbell, 1984). Indicators, namely components of tie strength, are for example closeness, intimacy and interpersonal support in personal relationships (Frenzen & Davis, 1990). One of the most important predictors is the frequency of interpersonal interaction (Marsden & Campbell, 1984), hence tie strength is associated with the amount of information that is exchanged (Brown & Reingen, 1987).

Tie strength has been found to affect social influence in various studies. However, results are not consistent. Results by Brown and Reingen (1987) on word-of-mouth mechanisms indicate that strong ties (e.g. friends in contrast to acquaintances) were perceived as being influential in consumer decision-making processes. Bond and colleagues (2012, see chapter 3.2.1) also observed that participants were more likely to engage in political self-expression (clicking a button that said *I voted*, which was then displayed on the participants' profile page) when they observed this behavior among their strong ties (in contrast to weak ties, who were less influential). In contrast to this, Steffes and Burgee (2009) observed that unknown Internet users were more influential than real life friends when evaluating the quality of a college professor's lecture.

Those conflicting findings could possibly be attributed to different definitions and conceptualizations of tie strength. For example, Steffes and Burgee (2009) compared unknown online users with face-to-face contacts, while according to the definition provided above the latter can also comprise different varieties of tie strength, as taken into account by Brown and Reingen (1987). Furthermore, studies within computer-mediated environments often measure tie strength through frequency of interaction online (a predictor, e.g. Bond et al., 2012), although Marsden and Campbell (1984) suggest that indicators (such as closeness) are more reliable than predictors to describe the concept. Apart from definitional issues, conflicting results regarding the effects of tie strength might also reflect varying processes of conformity, when goals for yielding to social influence are taken into account. In Steffes and Burgee's (2009) study, the process of evaluating the quality of the lecture could have been perceived as being of a more informational nature, rendering the goal of accuracy salient. In this case, a larger number of people might have been more indicative of a *right* choice than a few close people.

In general, tie strength can be conceptualized as a prerequisite as well as an influence factor for social influence. In terms of being described by predictors such as frequency of interaction, the effect of tie strength might be independent from the respective goal, because the more interaction takes place, the more likely the exchange of information and thus social influence. This is true for any kind of information, be it information on the accuracy of a behavior, information on means control of the agent, or information about the relationship towards the agent. Nevertheless, weak ties also play an important role with regard to information diffusion within social networks (e.g. Weimann, 1983).

3.3.3.3 Ambiguity of the Situation

When presenting early studies of social influence by Asch and Sherif (chapter 3.3), it was briefly mentioned that they employed different kinds of tasks which made the situation more or less ambiguous and how this may have different consequences for social influence (Allen & Levine, 1969). This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the following section. More precisely, not only the kind of task (judgment vs. knowledge task) but also the target's prior attitude and knowledge will be considered as aspects that affect social influence processes.

Studies on social influence distinguish between *preference tasks* (Prislin & Wood, 2005) or *attitudinal items* (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) and *objective tasks* (Prislin & Wood, 2005) or *physical items* (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), the latter implying that there exists an objective solution for the task at hand which is available to the target. In contrast to this, preference tasks use situations with subjective evaluations or indeterminable solutions. According to Insko et al. (1983), early empirical results show, and a lot of theorists agree, that conformity is less likely when the task or situation at hand is objectively appraisable, in private (e.g. Aronson, 1980 in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Allen, 1965 in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) as well as in public situations (Asch, 1956 in Turner, 1991). Accordingly, Festinger (1954) explains that ambiguous tasks do not allow physical reality testing as the situation cannot be assessed objectively. In this case, social reality testing takes place and conformity occurs. In contrast to this assumption, Insko et al. (1983) found that participants conformed more strongly when they believed there was a "right" answer to a task which they were unable to solve themselves, which the authors interpreted as evidence of the concern for being correct (goal of accuracy). Indeed, a lot of researchers argue that different kinds of tasks elicit different processes of conformity, in line with different goals for yielding to social influence: While objective tasks that comprise a "right" answer are assumed to elicit informational influence (goal of accuracy), judgmental tasks are expected to elicit normative influence (goal of affiliation or positive self-evaluation) (e.g. Huang et al., 1997; Kaplan & Miller, 1987).

The second aspect considered to affect ambiguity of the situation and thus social influence processes is the level of prior knowledge or competence of the target within the respective field of knowledge (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) which reduces the difficulty of the given task. This issue is mainly concerned with conformity processes elicited by the goal of accuracy. For example, Coleman, Blake and Mouton (1958) found that conformity increased when the task at hand became more difficult to solve, which Eagly and Chaiken (1993) interpreted as evidence of the goal of accuracy. Baron, Vandello and Brunsman (1996) also found that the difficulty of a task affected conformity processes, particularly when the goal of accuracy was considered important: When the task was not difficult, pursuing the goal of accuracy decreased social influence with confederates (who gave wrong answers). An opposing effect occurred when the task was difficult: social influence increased when the goal of accuracy was important. In line with these results and also important for the current thesis is the fact that eWOM effects have also been found to be dependent on the target's prior knowledge (e.g. Hung & Li, 2007).

Finally, not only prior knowledge but also prior opinion has to be taken into account as a factor that affects social influence processes, as a prior opinion may reduce the ambiguity of the situation or increase consistency when several prior attitudes exist. Prior opinion of the target has for example been found to be a stronger predictor of final attitudes than the attitudes and behavior of others in a conformity situation (Price, Nir, & Capella, 2006). Consistency theories are concerned with how prior attitude towards the subject of evaluation and the influencing agent affects social influence processes in particular. As outlined in chapter 3.3.2.4, prior attitudes might create cognitive inconsistencies which lead people to adapt their (prior as well as newly formed) attitudes, whereas the stronger an attitude is, the less likely is it to change (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). In line with the assumptions of consistency theories, Wood, Pool, Leck, and Purvis (1996) observed that participants who had been told that their (prior) opinions on the subject of discrimination were in line with the position of a disliked group, changed their own opinion so that they did not match that of the group anymore.

3.3.3.4 Number of Influencing Agents

Most of the literature suggests a positive relationship between the number of influencing agents¹ and the strength of respective conformity effects (Asch, 1955; Insko, Smith, Alicke, Wade, & Taylor, 1985;

¹Literature on the number of influencing agents in social influence processes often refers to the term "group size" (e.g. Hewstone & Martin, 2012; Insko et al., 1985). As discussed in chapter 3.1, and as will be outlined at the end of this section, a group from a social psychology perspective has psychological implications for the target that exceed those of a plain accumulation of different individuals. Consequently, instead of group size, the term "number of influencing agents" will be used to connote this differentiation.

Lee & Nass, 2002). However, the exact properties of this relationship are still subject to debate, as empirical findings on this aspect are inconsistent, as will be outlined in the following.

Several theoretical approaches exist that aim to explain the relationship between the number of influencing agents and the strength of social influence in more detail. For example, social impact theory (Latané, 1981) focuses on fraction size as a central determinant of social influence. It is assumed that increasing fraction size enhances social influence in the form of a power function (rather than a linear relationship), in which every additional source of influence (influencing agent) exerts a smaller influence than the first one (Latané & Wolf, 1981; Bond, 2005).

Insko and colleagues (1985) provide several explanations for this power function. For example, they suggest that the target might perceive additional sources of social influence as having already been influenced by the first source as well. Another explanation refers to the target processing additional sources as part of a larger perception unit – both of which would explain why each additional source is less influential than the previous one (Insko et al., 1985). Looking at classical empirical studies, however, results are not always in line with this. For example, according to Campbell and Fairey (1989) as well as Insko et al. (1985), a lot of results obtained by Solomon Asch are not in line with the power function of social impact theory as he found additional confederates were more influential than the first one and conformity increased up to a number of four confederates, after which the effect remained constant. Asch (1955 in Bond, 2005) assumed that three influencing agents are necessary so that their opinion is not perceived as individualistic. If there are more than three influencing agents, the target merely perceives this as repeated confirmation (Asch, 1955).

To summarize, the exact relationship between the number of influencing agents and the strength of social influence is yet to be determined (although all results agree that it is a positive relationship). Empirical results further suggest that it might be affected by several aspects, such as context or the salient goal for yielding to social influence: Regarding the target's goal for yielding to social influence, the effect of the number of influencing agents on conformity can be explained via the goal of accuracy as well as that of affiliation (as suggested by Insko et al., 1985). The more people agree on a subject, the more likely it is that this consensus is believed to reflect actual reality, because it is likely to be based on an external context. Hence, a larger number of influencing agents is assumed to be a more reliable indicator of accuracy. When the goal of affiliation is salient, a larger number of influencing agents might possess a stronger potential for rewards and punishments (Insko et al., 1985). Depending on the underlying goal, the number of influencing agents may affect social influence differently (Bond, 2005). For example, Campbell and Farey (1989) conducted a study following a Crutchfield-paradigm (non-FTF-situation with false feedback on others' evaluations in a

task). They found that social influence based on the goal of accuracy follows a power function (as suggested by social impact theory), while the goal of affiliation fosters an s-shaped curve, suggesting that at some point the effect of additional sources remains constant. When the evaluation of the influencing agents was thought to be accurate, the effect of group size was small and there was basically no difference between public and private evaluation (Campbell & Farey, 1989). The authors assumed that for pursuing the goal of accuracy, the first source of influence is crucial and that each additional source produces redundancies (as also suggested by Insko et al. (1985) when explaining the power function). When the evaluation of the influencing agents was obviously wrong (eliminating effects based on the goal of accuracy, an assumption the authors based on Asch, 1952), the effect of group size was very strong and there was a clear difference between public and private evaluation (Campbell & Farey, 1989). Based on this study, Bond (2005) further investigated whether the relationship between the number of influencing agents and the strength of conformity varies, depending on whether the evaluation is made publicly or privately and whether the situation follows an Asch- (suggesting influence based on the goal of affiliation, see chapter 3.3.2.2) or a Crutchfield-paradigm (suggesting influence based on the goal of accuracy). Bond (2005) presents a meta-analysis of 125 empirical studies that use a line judgment task (as used by Asch, e.g. 1955), in which participants were confronted with the wrong assessment of others (one or several individuals). Regarding public conformity, results of the meta-analysis showed rather small correlations between the number of influencing agents and the target's response, both for the Asch-paradigm and for the Crutchfield-paradigm (the latter showing the smallest correlation). For the Asch-paradigm, the effect remained constant after the third additional source. In contrast to this, when it came to private conformity, studies that employed the Asch-paradigm revealed a negative relationship between the number of influencing agents and conformity, while the Crutchfield-paradigm led to a strong positive correlation. The author suggested that the negative relationship in the Asch-paradigm is a sign of participants feeling the need to preserve their individuality after conforming publicly (Bond, 2005). Further studies examining the relationship between fraction size effects and goals for yielding to social influence manipulated participants' prior experience (Rosenberg, 1961, see also chapter 3.3.3.3) as well as the publicness of evaluation (Insko et al., 1985) and the ambiguity of the situation (Insko et al., 1985) to deduce respective goals. For example, Rosenberg (1961) found that a prior experience treatment that persuaded participants they were unsuccessful at solving the task increased conformity (in a curvilinear relationship), suggesting they pursued the goal of accuracy. Insko et al. (1985) found evidence that effects based on both the goal of accuracy and the goal of affiliation were affected by fraction size in the same way: four confederates were more influential than one confederate.

Besides group size/number of influencing agents affecting the strength of social influence by serving as an indicator of what is accurate or by increasing social pressure, the role of group and interpersonal processes needs to be considered. It has been discussed in earlier chapters (e.g. 3.1) that both single individuals and groups (or single individuals who represent a group) can elicit conformity. By definition, a group is more than the sum of several individuals, but a group implies having psychological consequences for the target (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). As a consequence, there might be different mechanisms coming into play depending on what the influencing agent represents, for example when contrasting Kelman's (1958; 1961) concept of identification and self-categorization theory from the social identity framework (chapter 3.3.2.3): Depending on whether the influencing agent is (or is perceived as being) a group or an individual, social influence might be affected by different aspects, e.g. interpersonal relationships or group cohesiveness (Sassenberg, 2011). This aspect is presumably connected to the goal of positive self-evaluation. Based on this, it can be assumed that the number of influencing agents might also determine whether the target is subject to group or interpersonal processes and associated mechanisms. For example, one good friend might be more persuasive than three unknown people, as shown by Egebark & Ekström (2011, see chapter 3.2.1) – or in other words: The effects of group size/number of influencing agents might interact with other influential factors, such as relationship towards the source, depending on which goal of the target is salient.

3.4 Short Summary: Conformity on Facebook

The first part of the literature review, focusing on social influence, aimed to present theoretical approaches and associated empirical results that are applicable to the Facebook context as the subject of the current research. The detailed application of the given aspects to the Facebook environment will be undertaken at the end of the literature review. Only a short summary will be given here, to emphasize the role of impression management (subject of the next chapter) in the process of social influence on SNS.

The current definition of social influence (chapter 3.1) follows a target-centered approach, focusing on the goals for yielding to social influence to explain respective processes (rather than for example on the message or the intention of the influencing agent). Furthermore, the current conceptualization includes different potential reactions as a result of the process, namely attitude change and/or behavioral change or no changes at all. It has been outlined how, depending on the respective goal, public behavior and private attitude are affected by different aspects and the effect may vary in persistence. For example, the goal of affiliation is often associated with a process of compliance,

leading to a superficial change in behavior without the corresponding attitude change, just to please the influencing agent or the audience of the associated behavior to avoid rejection (chapter 3.3.2.2). In that sense, the characteristics of not only the audience but also the situation have to be taken into account which might affect conformity processes. As Tetlock and Manstead (1985) as well as Baumeister (1982) stated, public conformity is associated with impression management: The more public the reaction and the more likely the audience is to identify the target, the more likely the target is to conform (chapter 3.3.3.1, depending on the underlying goal). Based on this, one might assume that on Facebook, public conformity based on the goal of affiliation is very likely because of the generally high accountability (see chapter 3.3.3.1). However, the situation on Facebook differs from that of most classical conformity studies. In classical studies (e.g. Asch, 1956), the influencing agents are also the ones observing the target's reaction. On a social network site like Facebook, the audience is much broader and undefined (e.g. Haferkamp, 2010; Vitak, 2012): On the one hand, the people shown in the *like*-display (as the influencing agent from a conformity perspective) might not even notice the conformity reaction; on the other hand, public behavior is also visible to the target's Facebook contacts from other, different social circles (chapter 2.2.2), the latter containing important implications for impression management and self-presentational processes associated with public behavior on SNS that might affect public conformity reactions, as will be outlined in the next chapter of the literature review.

Chapter 4

Self-Presentation

In the last chapter, public behavior was discussed as a potential consequence of social influence. Whenever there is a real or imagined audience for people's behavior, they may be concerned with the impression this particular behavior conveys to others (Schlenker, 1980 in Mummendey, Bolten, & Irle, 1993). According to Tetlock and Manstead (1985, p.60), "people are highly sensitive to the social significance of their conduct and are motivated to create desired identities in interpersonal encounters". This is one of the basic assumptions of impression management (or self-presentation) theory that has to be taken into account when investigating conformity processes with public behavioral consequences. In the following chapter, the concept of impression management and its basic ideas will be outlined first, after which the question why people engage in impression management will be examined. Furthermore, the situations in which self-presentation is likely to become the focus of attention (*impression motivation*, Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and how it is conducted (*impression construction*, Leary & Kowalski, 1990) will be discussed, the latter with a particular focus on how conformity and impression management are associated. Furthermore, personal factors will be discussed that affect impression motivation and impression construction, before consequences and empirical results regarding self-presentation on social network sites are presented.

4.1 The Concept of Self-Presentation

Impression management and self-presentation theories are based on the assumption that people are generally concerned with the impressions others gain of them (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985) and that they further consciously or unconsciously strive to control these impressions (Mummendey et al., 1993 based on Schlenker, 1980). Accordingly, the act of self-presentation can be defined as "controlling how one is perceived by other people" (Leary, 1995, p. 2) by using "behavior to

communicate some information about oneself to others" (Baumeister, 1982, p. 3). In the current thesis, the terms *self-presentation* and *impression management* will be used interchangeably (e.g. Leary, 1995), because - in line with current approaches in social psychology research - impression management is assumed to be closely connected to the self-concept (Mummendey, Eifler & Melcher, 1995). This aspect will be outlined in more detail at the end of this section.

Self-presentation can be regarded as "an essential component of social interaction" (Leary, 1995, p.3). While a lot of social psychologists suggest that self-presentation only occurs in certain social situations (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000), in this thesis it will be assumed - according to Schlenker and Pontari (2000) - that self-presentation is always a part of every social situation but that the question of whether it becomes the focus of the actor's attention is dependent on the actor's goal, the audience and the respective situation. This way, self-presentation can become a foreground agenda of the respective social interaction or a background agenda (this aspect will be elaborated on in chapter 4.3.1).

Up to this point, no comprehensive theory of impression management exists (Jones & Pittman, 1982), although it has been subject to theoretical reasoning and empirical investigation for quite some time now. The first person to suggest a systematic investigation of impression management behavior (Leary, 1995) was the sociologist Erving Goffman (1959 in Mummendey et al., 1995), who based his ideas on the concept of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934 in Mummendey et al., 1995). He describes interdependence between one's own self-image and the public image of one's self in a form of learning process: others' reactions to our behavior determine how we present ourselves to gain social approval (in Mummendey et al., 1995). Hence, impression management or self-presentation serves the purpose of influencing the target's perception of the self. However, according to Goffman (1959 in Mummendey et al., 1995), not every kind of information one communicates can be controlled in that way. He distinguishes between information *given* (intended communication, e.g. verbal information) and information *given off* (unintended communication, e.g. some forms of nonverbal behavior such as blushing). When describing impression management, Goffman (1959) used a dramaturgical approach, making use of terminology from theater and acting (Leary, 1995). He focused on describing rules, techniques and rituals by which impression management takes place and which overall remain very theoretical (Mummendey et al., 1995).

Impression management was and still is often associated with concepts such as deception and manipulation, focusing on the respective audience and how a self-presenter influences that audience, with a quite negative connotation (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Nowadays and from a social psychology perspective, not only the audience's reactions but also the self-concept as a (second) cause for

impression management has increasingly gained attention (Schlenker, 1980). In detail, Schlenker describes self-presentation as *packaging* (e.g. in contrast to *deception*): Depending on the context, a different aspect of the self may be salient and presented. In that sense, one may think of self-presentation as selective disclosure and accentuation instead of intended deception (Jones & Pittman, 1982). According to Schlenker and Pontari (2000), this (regulation and control of information) is an essential component of successful social interaction and independent of the actor's motives. It also implies that the publicly presented self is not necessarily different from the real self-concept (Jones & Pittman, 1982). "Rather than lying, people typically select the images they want others to form from their repertoire of true self-images" (Leary, 1995, p. 4). As impression management found its way into the field of social psychology, the term impression management was widely used, nowadays the more common term used in social psychology is self-presentation because it emphasizes the relevance of the self-concept in this process more strongly (Mummendey et al., 1995).

4.2 Self-Presentational Concerns

According to Baumeister (1982), Leary (1995) as well as Leary and Kowalski (1990), two motives for focusing on impression management in social interaction can be distinguished: *pleasing the audience* (Leary (1995) called it *interpersonal influence*) and *self-construction*, parallel to what was outlined in the previous section about self-presentation being partly determined by social interaction and partly determined by the self-concept.

The goal of pleasing the audience reflects the desire to gain rewards which the audience controls, similar to the goal of affiliation when it comes to conformity (Leary & Kowalski 1990; chapter 3.3.2.2). Conveying an appropriate impression increases the likeliness of desired outcomes (e.g. approval, friendship) and of reducing costs or avoiding undesired outcomes such as rejection (e.g. Leary, 1995; Schlenker, 1980). However, the right or appropriate impression does not necessarily imply a favorable one based on a goal for social approval, as sometimes people might also be motivated to appear unfavorable, e.g. incompetent (Mummendey et al., 1993). Hence, self-presentation based on the goal of pleasing the audience is shaped to the preferences of the particular audience (as will be outlined in the next section) as well as the respective desired reaction. In line with that, self-presentation motivated by the desire to please the audience is likely to be tailored to a certain audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

The goal of self-construction contains the maintenance of self-esteem and the development of identity (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). According to Leary (1995) it has been observed that impression

management may also become a foreground agenda in situations that do not require audiences to be influenced. However, in those situations, self-presentation may for example serve the purpose of self-esteem maintenance as self-presentational success leads to a positive self-image accompanied by positive emotions (Leary, 1995). In that sense, "self-esteem and emotions can be affected by simply imagining what others think of us" (Leary, 1995, p. 43). Furthermore, self-presentation may help us to construct our own identity: To perceive oneself in a certain way, one has to act consistent with that self-image (Gollwitzer, 1986 in Leary, 1995). When our behavior is in line with what we think of ourselves (Leary, 1995), the public self is brought into line with the ideal self (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). As a consequence, self-presentation based on self-construction goals is assumed to be less susceptible to changes than self-presentation that aims to please the audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

4.3 Self-Presentation in Social Interaction

4.3.1 Self-Presentation as Fore- and Background Agenda

In different social situations, self-presentation may operate in a different mode, either representing a foreground or a background agenda within the social interaction (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Though Leary (1995) suggests that all of our behavior is guided or constrained by our concerns about others' impressions, according to Schlenker and Pontari (2000) impression management is not always the primary goal. For example, self-presentation may be a background agenda so that automated, well-learned processes of impression management can operate on an unconscious level (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Results by Cialdini et al. (1976 in Schlenker & Pontari, 2000) suggest that a very prominent example of self-presentation on a background level is conformity towards a salient, attractive audience. In contrast to that, the self-presentational agenda becomes a foreground agenda when the respective impression is valued or important or when the situation is new (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Impression motivation in this context refers to the "degree to which people desire to create certain impressions in others' minds in a particular situation" (Leary, 1995, p. 47).

Several characteristics of a situation may affect the mode of impression management (Leary, 1995). For example, impressions others gain of us need to be perceived as goal-relevant (Leary, 1995), referring to the question, to what extent the audience reaction (caused by their respective impressions of the person) is relevant for the goals the self-presenter pursues (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). This in turn is mainly determined by the publicness of behavior: The greater the chance that an action is observed by others, the more a person is concerned about the respective impression this action

conveys (Leary, 1995). Furthermore, the self-presenter's dependence on the audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and the interaction frequency between self-presenter and audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) are assumed to affect goal-relevance. The second situational aspect to determine impression motivation is the value of the respective, desired goals: The more essential the goal is for the actor, the more likely self-presentation is to become a foreground agenda (Leary, 1995).

4.3.2 Self-Presentational Preferences

Arkin (1981) assumed individual differences regarding the preferred way of presenting oneself, resulting in two forms of self-presentation that "arise from two separate and unrelated motivational systems" (Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986, p. 356). Acquisitive self-presentation subsumes all self-presentational efforts that are attraction-seeking (Jones, 1964 in Arkin, 1981), driven by the desire to gain social or material rewards. Wolfe, Lennox and Cutler (1986) subsumed acquisitive self-presentation under the general aim of getting ahead, referring to manifestations such as power or status. In contrast to that, protective self-presentation represents - according to Arkin (1981) - a "countervailing force" (p. 314), a "desire to avoid significant losses in social approval or actually garnering social disapproval" (Arkin, 1981, p. 314). Similarly, Wolfe et al. (1986) describe how defensive (or protective) self-presentation refers to the aim of getting along. The probability for either form of self-presentation may differ depending on the situation (see next chapter) or between individuals (see chapter 4.5.2). In detail, Arkin (1981) assumes that both self-presentational motivations can be distinguished conceptually and empirically: If an individual lacks both motivations, he or she acts without any self-presentational concerns; if any of these motivations exist, a respective form of self-presentation occurs - either acquisitive or protective. In particular protective self-presentation is associated with opinion conformity and social anxiety (Arkin, 1981). Arkin explains this in the following way: For protective self-presentation to occur, the disapproval-avoiding self-presenter must be aware of the possibility of disapproval. Disapproval can develop if the self-presenter conveys an image that the target does not like or if the self-presentation of an image that the target likes fails. In this context, Arkin also argues that self-referent cognitions, affect and self-evaluation may be sufficient for protective self-presentation to occur; hence, even the feeling of self-presentational failure (without any reaction from the target) may be motivation enough. The resulting self-presentational style is described as a form of self-presentation that is conservative and does not attract attention - manifestations of this form are for example opinion conformity and compliance (Arkin, 1981).

According to Wolfe, Lennox and Cutler (1986), behavioral manifestations for both forms of self-presentation can be identical, hence it is often difficult to distinguish them empirically. Accordingly, it

might be hard to determine whether *liking* a Facebook Page in general represents a protective or an acquisitive strategy. However, as the present thesis focuses on *liking* as a conformity reaction, it seems worthwhile to consider protective self-presentation as a potential influence factor.

4.3.3 Determinants of Self-Presentation

The image that people try to communicate to others is dependent on several aspects. Based on what was outlined in the last chapter, Arkin (1981) for example identified several factors that affect the likeliness of protective self-presentation in particular, such as the target, the situation and the self-presenter, as all of these aspects can increase the likelihood of self-presentational failure and thus disapproval. Regarding relational characteristics, Arkin (1981) describes situations in which a certain image has to be conveyed for a long period of time or situations in which the audience (their preferences and standards) are unknown. As will be outlined in the subsequent chapter, this applies to the environment of social network sites.

Furthermore, self-presentation in general can also be affected by the various self-images a person possesses. The public image people want to convey is often consistent with their own current self-image as they tend to have problems with portraying public images that do not fit their private self-image (Schlenker, 1980 in Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Apart from the actual self-image, self-presentation is also affected by desired or undesired self-images (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), so that the way people present themselves is not only shaped by the way they currently see themselves but also by the way in which they would want or would not want to see themselves.

Another aspect to affect the form of self-presentation, apart from the self-concept, is the current social image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). For example, self-presentation is affected by the knowledge the audience has already attained with regard to the self-presenter, for example when the audience consists of friends or acquaintances (target knowledge, Baumeister & Jones, 1978). In line with that, it has been found that self-presentation differs depending on whether it is directed at strangers or at friends (Brown & Garland, 1971 in Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Derlega, Wilson & Chaiken, 1976 in Baumeister & Jones, 1978). Baumeister and Jones (1978) assume that prior knowledge of the audience may result in an implicit pressure to appear consistent with what is already known. They conducted an experiment in which participants were asked to talk to confederates (strangers to the participants) who had ostensibly seen the participants' personality profile before the meeting. When analysing the subsequent interaction between participants and confederates, they found that participants who thought their partners had acquired information about them tended to present themselves consistent with this information, independent of whether it presented them in a favorable

or unfavorable way. However, participants who presented themselves in accordance with unfavorable prior information, tended to present themselves in a more favorable way on other dimensions of their personality (of which the partner had no knowledge of). These results illustrate the importance of social determinants for the mode and form of self-presentation. Based on the fact that participants even went along with the unfavorable information they thought their discussion partner had learned, the authors conclude that social expectations might be even more important than the self-concept in shaping self-presentation (as also suggested by Schlenker, 1975 in Baumeister & Jones, 1978). In that sense, further influence factors are role constraints or target values because people tend to shape their public image in line with what they think the audience prefers (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). To summarize, the desired impression people want to convey is not only dependent on their self-concept, but also (and probably in particular) on the social context and the according underlying motivation.

4.4 Self-Presentation and Conformity

As already outlined in the chapter on social influence (3.3.3.1), conformity (at least when based on the goal for affiliation) is more likely to occur under conditions of surveillance by the influencing agent and is less likely when the target's accountability is low. Conformity based on the goal for affiliation is caused by means control of the influencing agent to grant some form of reward or to punish the target (e.g. through rejection), as described in chapter 3.3.2.2. In that regard, conformity based on the goal for affiliation seems to be similar to self-presentation based on the motive to please the audience to gain favorable reactions from them. Hence, from a self-presentational perspective, conformity is an active process in which a public self is created to influence the audience (Turner, 1991); to a certain extent the self-presenter also holds power over the process of social influence by changing the influencing agent's (the target of self-presentation) reactions (Schlenker, 1980 in Turner, 1991). Consequently, impression management can be regarded as a form of manipulating others' behavior, another form of social influence (Mummedey et al., 1995). Despite these similarities between impression management and conformity, self-presentation cannot universally be regarded as a cause for conformity, because - as discussed in chapter 3.3.3.1 - the goal for yielding to social influence needs to be taken into account as well (Leary, 1995). For example, self-presentation is less likely to be a cause of informational influence processes (Leary, 1995).

Another aspect that needs to be considered is that conformity does not necessarily lead to a favorable impression, as it is not always regarded in a positive way (Baumeister, 1982). In general, conformity

is perceived as being a socially undesirable behavior and conformists are regarded as less intelligent (Cialdini, Braver & Lewis, 1974 in Mummdendey et al., 1995). In line with that, Baumeister et al. (1979 in Turner, 1991) found people only show conformity when this behavior is likely to convey a positive impression of them. This audience reaction is particularly likely when the audience consists (solely) of the influencing agent: Braver, Linder, Corvin and Cialdini (1977 in Leary & Kowalski, 1990) observed that participants were less likely to show opinion conformity after being confronted with a persuasive speech when a third party was present (in contrast to when only the speaker was present). Indeed, an influencing agent seems to gain a positive impression of a person conforming to his/her opinion (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), while a non-involved observer perceives conformity as an attempt at ingratiation, in a negative way (Jones, Jones & Gergen, 1963 in Jones & Pittman, 1982). In that sense, the preferences of the audience members are not in line with each other. But this situation does not only cause a conflict regarding preferences of the audience members; Baumeister (1982) further describes how the presence of a third party causes a conflict between the two goals of impression management, as being regarded as a conformist may not be consistent with the person's own self-concept. Leary and Kowalski (1990) suggest that while the presence of an observer is connected to the goal of self-construction, the presence of the influencing agent (the persuader) is associated with the motive of pleasing the audience. Consequently, different behavior may emerge in situations in which a third party is present, depending on which goal is more salient. This, in turn, is dependent on the respective goal relevance that also determines whether impression management becomes a foreground agenda in the respective social situation. Here, also personality characteristics also play an important role, as well be outlined in the following section.

4.5 Personality Aspects

Several personality traits of the self-presenter exist which are regarded as relevant for impression motivation as well as impression construction (apart from situational aspects that were outlined in chapter 4.3). In the current context, those traits that are assumed and have been found to be associated with conformity behavior, will be focused on, namely the focus of self-attention (Turner, 1991) and the mode of self-monitoring. Both concepts have originally been assumed to moderate impression motivation. However, against the background of current theoretical development and empirical findings, they also seem to be relevant regarding self-presentational strategies, thus impression construction.

4.5.1 Focus of Self-Attention

While self-monitoring describes a person's tendency towards self-observation and behavioral change based on social cues, the idea of self-attention refers to the extent a person directs his/her attention about the self either outward or inward (Gibbons, 1990; Nystadt & Ljungberg, 2002 in Gogolinski, 2010). Different theoretical approaches to this concept exist, two of which will be presented here: objective vs. subjective self-awareness and public vs. private self-consciousness. Subjective and objective self-awareness (proposed by Duval & Wicklund, 1972 in Mummendey et al., 1995) can be regarded as state variables (Heinemann, 1979): Depending on which state a person is in (based on situational factors), he/she directs the awareness of the self either inwards (e.g. to mood and needs) or outwards. In the latter case, in a state of objective self-awareness, people "focus on how their actions look to others and show concern for their appearance before real or imagined audiences" (Schlenker, 1980, p. 73). Objective self-awareness increases the likelihood of self-evaluation in the form of comparing the current (public) self-image with the desired public self-image which may lead to a change in behavior to reduce dissonance between these two (Duval & Wicklund, 1972 in Schlenker, 1980). The concept of self-awareness and the consequences of respective subjective or objective states have been subject to a lot of empirical research (e.g. in the context of conformity) in which objective self-awareness was often increased by putting the participant in front of a mirror (e.g. Duval & Wicklund, 1972 in Mummendey et al., 1995), recording him/her with a camera (Insko et al., 1983) or by the presence of others (e.g. Duval, 1976 in Insko et al., 1983), as already mentioned in chapter 4.3.2. The other theoretical approach to describing different forms of attention towards the self is that of private and public self-consciousness, both concepts describing a consistent tendency within a person and thus a trait variable (Fenigstein et al., 1975). A person with a tendency towards public self-consciousness spends a great amount of time in a state of objective self-awareness and vice versa (Heinemann, 1979). People with a high public self-consciousness "tend to think more about those parts of themselves that are in public" (Leary, 1995, p. 51), e.g. physical appearance, reputation and the impressions others gain of them (Carver & Scheier, 1985 in Leary, 1995). In line with the assumption that both objective self-awareness and public self-consciousness describe similar concepts, it has been found that people with a high trait public self-consciousness behave in a similar way to people in the presence of a mirror (which is assumed to increase objective self-awareness) (Carver & Scheier, 1978 in Mummendey et al., 1995). Empirical investigations of this concept (using the Self-Consciousness Scale developed by Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975), which treats both forms of self-consciousness as separate trait variables) suggest that people scoring high on public self-consciousness are more concerned with managing their impressions (e.g. Buss, 1980 in Leary, 1995), and have a greater fear of social rejection (Fenigstein et al., 1975) and negative evaluation by

others (e.g. Leary & Kowalski, 1993 in Leary, 1995). In line with that, empirical evidence suggests that people with high public self-consciousness and in states of objective self-awareness are more likely to show conformity (assumably based on the goal of affiliation because of fear of rejection), for example in the form of compliance in an Asch-type paradigm experiment (Froming & Carver, 1981 in Leary, 1995). Results, however, are not consistent. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Gibbons (1990) did not generally support this assumption. Empirical evidence might suggest that impression management tends to represent a foreground agenda only for people with high public self-consciousness, while people with high private self-consciousness tend to express their true and authentic identity while not focusing on impression management (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). A study by Schlenker and Weigold (1990 in Schlenker & Pontari, 2000) however illustrates that people with a high private self-consciousness do not differ from people with a high public self-consciousness regarding the extent of conscious self-presentational activities but that they pursue other goals: While people with a high public self-consciousness tended to adapt to the audience's expectations (and show conformity), people with a high private self-consciousness used self-presentational tactics to appear autonomous. Hence, people with a high private self-consciousness "are inner-directed but not oblivious to the opinion of others" (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000, p. 216). Interpreted this way, the focus of self-attention not only determines the mode (background or foreground) but also the form of self-presentation. As the focus of this thesis is self-presentation as a consequence and also cause of public conformity, public self-consciousness seems to be of particular relevance for the current research.

4.5.2 Self-Monitoring

The theory of self-monitoring was originally proposed by Snyder (1974 in Mummendey et al., 1995). The concept refers to an interindividually varying tendency (thus, a trait variable) to monitor and control one's public behavior (Mummendey et al., 1995). Snyder (1974; 1981 in Mummendey et al., 1995) describes how situational cues to the appropriateness of certain behaviors guide self-observation. Successfully managing others' impressions requires two abilities: One has to interpret the social situation in the right way and be able to adjust one's own behavior accordingly (Leary, 1995). Two types of self-monitors are distinguished in Snyder's conception, which differ with regard to both of the aforementioned abilities: Those with a high tendency towards self-monitoring are assumed to adapt their behavior to the requirements of the specific social situation while low self-monitors are suggested to barely consider social aspects and instead tend to express their own and true opinion by their public behavior (Graf, 2004). High self-monitors are able to control their expressive behavior and to assess the appropriateness of certain behaviors depending on the situation (Leary, 1995). They are

more likely to take social comparison information into account and consequently, it is assumed that their behavior may differ ostensibly between social situations (Mummendey et al., 1995), as they tailor their behavior to the specific audience (Berscheid et al., 1976 in Leary, 1995). They are similar to the archetype of a self-presenter which Goffman had in mind (Laux & Renner, 2002). In accordance with the description of the respective self-monitoring types, Snyder (1974 in Laux & Renner, 2002) proposed a measurement scale that treats self-monitoring as a one-dimensional personality trait (Laux & Renner, 2002), distinguishing either high or low self-monitors. Despite empirical evidence that this instrument can predict the way people behave and present themselves, it has often been subject to criticism: In various studies its reliability was found to be low and exploratory factor analyses suggest several subscales, indicating that the construct of self-monitoring might be multi-dimensional (Laux & Renner, 2002; Leary, 1995; Mummendey et al., 1995). This multi-dimensionality was also proposed by Snyder (1974 in Lennox & Wolfe, 1984) but not considered when the original scale was constructed. In 1984, Lennox and Wolfe presented a revision of the self-monitoring scale, taking into account different potential components of this construct. In 1986, the authors (Wolfe et al., 1986) linked those components to people's tendency towards acquisitive and protective self-presentation (Arkin, 1981; see chapter 4.3.2). Empirical evidence suggests that the components of the revised scale (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984) appropriately describe these two different ways of self-monitoring which represent different preferences for self-presentation, as they correlate with different personality traits (e.g. Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). In detail, the revised scale comprises two subscales, two for each self-presentational component (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). The first dimension (*Revised Self-Monitoring Scale*, later considered to be the acquisitive component (Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986)) is measured using the *Ability to Modify Self-Presentation* as well as the *Sensitivity to Expressive Behavior of Others* scales (which describe both components of successful self-monitoring proposed by Snyder (1974 in Leary, 1995)). Furthermore, the subscales *Cross-situational Variability of Behavior* and *Attention to Social Comparison Information* (or: *Protective Social Comparison*, Wolfe et al., 1986) constitute the protective dimension of self-monitoring (*Concern for Appropriateness-Scale*), which for example has been found to correlate with social anxiety (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984) and to be negatively associated with self-esteem (Johnson et al., 1984 in Wolfe et al., 1986). Even before the scale was linked to the protective form of self-presentation, concern for appropriateness had been associated with susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Wolfe, Lennox & Hudiburg, 1983 in Wolfe et al., 1986, Wolfe et al., 1985 in Wolfe et al., 1986). Consequently, the authors assumed that the latter scale may be useful to assess a person's tendency towards public conformity (Wolfe et al., 1986). The authors did not define it further but based on the content of the scale and the conception of the underlying construct, it seems reasonable to assume that the form of conformity associated with

concern for appropriateness is based on the goal of affiliation because the focus lies on the reaction of the audience.

The aforementioned personality traits have not only been investigated with respect to their role in face-to-face self-presentation but have partly also been subject to empirical research in CMC situations, particularly Web2.0 and social network sites. The following chapter will discuss respective empirical results, after providing an overview of theoretical conceptions and empirical findings regarding self-presentational strategies and tactics on social network sites.

4.6 Self-Presentation on Social Network Sites

The emergence of Web2.0/social media platforms, which enable the user to construct semi-public profiles and create online-content, has caused self-presentation to become a major factor in media use nowadays (Papacharissi, 2002). Consequently, a lot of research has already been conducted on what kind of content people create, what kind of information they share and how they present themselves online, particularly on social network sites. The following chapter will provide an overview of theoretical approaches towards self-presentation in social media and its characteristics before presenting empirical results on strategies, tactics as well as the respective impact of users' personality characteristics.

4.6.1 Characteristics of Social Networks Sites relevant to Self-Presentation

4.6.1.1 Controllability

Controllability is an aspect that distinguishes self-presentation on SNS from that in face-to-face situations. Because communication on SNS is largely asynchronous (see chapter 2.1), a self-presenter holds greater control over the information that he/she gives away (Krämer & Winter, 2008). Automatic, spontaneous and unconscious reactions are less likely to become public, because of the possibility of systematic and extended reflection about which information one writes down or adds to one's own profile (Krämer & Winter, 2008). In Goffman's (1956) terms, information *given off* is less likely to play a role in online contexts, while information *given* assumingly represents the major part of self-presentational information. It is thus likely that impression management online becomes more strategic than in face-to-face contexts (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006).

It has to be mentioned though that the aspect of controllability is not inherently a characteristic of social network sites or Web2.0 phenomena. Even before that concept was born, CMC was regarded

as more controllable, for example personal homepages were considered as a means of carefully constructed self-presentation (Dominick, 1999 in Krämer & Winter, 2008). As a consequence, self-presentation and self-descriptions online may also be deceptive in nature, something that is often not possible in face-to-face situations (Donath, 1999 in Haferkamp, 2010). However, deceptive self-presentation becomes less likely the more easily one's virtual identity can be associated with one's offline identity (Douglas & McGarty, 2001).

4.6.1.2 Anchored Relationships and the Warranting Principle

While in anonymous online environments it is possible to create an impression utterly different from how we present ourselves offline (deceptive self-presentation), this is not as easy on SNS such as Facebook. Social networks on Facebook often consist of anchored relationships between people who already know a lot about each other (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfeld, 2006; Lampe, Ellison & Steinfeld, 2007; Ross et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2008), increasing accountability (see chapter 3.3.3.1). This has two major consequences for self-presentation online: a) anchored relationships comprise a knowing self-presentational audience and b) reliable third party information might outdo information given away by the self-presenter in terms of determining impression formation.

As outlined in chapter 4.4 (e.g. Baumeister & Jones, 1978), audience knowledge can affect self-presentational strategies and tactics as the self-presenter may perceive implicit pressure to appear consistent with what is already known about him/her. For example, if a user were to post information about him/herself that is not true, people who know him/her may unmask this deception publicly (Lampe et al., 2007) or they might react in a negative way.

Furthermore, friends and acquaintances may proactively publish information on a user's personal profile, creating another restriction for self-presentation (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007 in Haferkamp, 2010; co-construction, see chapter 2.2.1). According to the warranting principle, third party information is perceived as less biased as well as less likely to be manipulated (Utz, 2010). It thus has more impact regarding the overall impression than the information provided by the self-presenter (Utz, 2010; Walther, van der Heide, Hamel & Shulman, 2009). A study conducted by Walther and colleagues in 2009 confirmed that an observer's impression of a SNS user's personal characteristics was more likely to be determined by information that was posted by friends of that user than by information that the user posted him/herself.

These two aspects are assumed to affect people's general strategies for impression management on SNS such as Facebook: As already suggested by Douglas and McGarty (2001), it might be assumed that self-presentation in SNS is unlikely to be deceptive in nature. Furthermore, the possibility of

third party information has to be taken into account and integrated into the general self-presentation strategy, for example by controlling which kind of information others may publish about oneself. Results obtained by Rui and Stefanone (2012) indeed suggest that controlling unwanted other-provided information as a form of protective self-presentation (for example by not allowing one's own profile to be linked to others' photos) may constitute a relevant part of self-presentational concerns on SNS.

4.6.1.3 Publicness and Undetermined/Multiple Audiences

One aspect that characterizes communication on SNS is the publicness of behavior. Applications exist that are inherently public (for example twitter) with no possibility of controlling who sees the user-generated content. Even in less public spaces (e.g. Facebook), where connections among users (which require permissions from both sides, Lampe et al., 2007) determine visibility of content (see chapter 2.2.2), the audience is potentially greater than in face-to-face contexts (Krämer & Winter, 2008). Against the background of what has been discussed regarding publicness of behavior and impression motivation (chapter 4.3.1) it may first be assumed that on SNS, self-presentation is mainly a foreground agenda.

In face-to-face situations, the audience has been assumed and found to be a major determinant for the mode and form of self-presentation (e.g. Baumeister & Jones, 1978). On SNS, the audience differs from that in face-to-face contexts, as it may be largely unknown and very heterogeneous, thus less assessable. Audience members may differ regarding personal background, interests, values, age or gender (Krämer & Winter, 2008). In the face of an unknown audience, a self-presenter has to work with *imagined audiences* (Marwick & boyd, 2011). On twitter, for example, the way a user imagines his/her audience has been found to determine the content of the tweets (Marwick & boyd, 2011). In general, self-presentation on SNS is assumed to be more likely to be tailored to a broader, less determined number of observers (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2010) because a SNS profile is required to fulfill a larger number of self-presentational goals (Krämer & Winter, 2008). This is one reason that Krämer and Winter (2008) assume that stable personality characteristics may become more important for self-presentation than the audience in SNS contexts and one may even assume that self-construction may become the major motive for self-presentation (more important than pleasing the audience). On the other hand, this situation can also be assumed to be very likely to foster protective (rather than acquisitive) self-presentation, as suggested by Arkin (1981).

Furthermore, the particular composition of the potential/imagined audience has to be taken into account. On less public network sites such as Facebook, a user's social network tends to comprise

several social groups from one's "offline" life (Lampinen et al., 2009; Pempek et al., 2009), causing a collapse of social contexts with extensive consequences for identity management as well as self-presentation online (e.g. boyd, 2008b). A user tends to perceive the self-presentational audience on Facebook as being correspondingly heterogeneous (Lampe et al., 2006). Not only is tailoring one's self-presentation to a certain audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) not possible because of this, a self-presenter has also to take into account different states of knowledge about him/herself among the audience members (Lampinen et al., 2009). As a consequence, impression construction might be affected by different audiences, a) because of the pressure to be consistent with what the different members of the potential audience already know about the self-presenter (see last section and chapter 4.4; Baumeister & Jones, 1978) and b) because of what kind of information the self-presenter wants to reveal to the different audience members, e.g. one's friends, boss or parents (Lampinen et al. 2009).

Against the background of what is outlined here, it becomes clear that conformity in particular as a self-presentational tactic takes place under different conditions than in face-to-face situations. The audience is unlikely to be limited to those people eliciting conformity as was the case in most previous conformity studies (e.g. Asch, 1955). Consequently, ingratiation as a self-presentational tactic (conformity based on the goal of affiliation) is restricted by what other members of the audience might know about the potential conformist and also by what others may think of the conformity act (Cialdini, Braver & Lewis, 1974 in Mummendey et al., 1995, see chapter 4.4).

4.6.2 Empirical Results

4.6.2.1 The Nature of Self-Presentation on SNS: Strategic and Flattering, but Authentic

Studies with the aim of determining to what extent self-presentational concerns play a role regarding public behavior online, e.g. when filling out a SNS profile, suggest impression management is a foreground agenda in these contexts. In line with what was assumed regarding the general publicness and respective consequences for impression motivation (chapter 4.3.1), online users report carefully considering what kind of information they reveal about themselves on SNS (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2010). Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman and Nuijten (2010) found that controlling information was perceived as being an important self-presentational goal among Facebook users. A study from 2012, using a meta-perception methodology, suggests that Facebook profiles not only convey (and are aimed to convey) a large bandwidth of impressions, but that they are tactically constructed, explicitly stressing certain aspects of the self, while other characteristics are de-emphasized (Toma & Carlson, 2012).

Despite this tactical kind of self-presentation, Facebook profiles should be less likely to be deceptive (e.g. than in anonymous online environments), against the background of what was outlined in chapter 3.3.3.1. Indeed, studies indicate that authenticity seems to be the general self-presentational strategy on SNS such as Facebook. A study from 2006, conducted by Lampe and colleagues among a sample of college students, showed that Facebook users felt accurately and authentically represented by their Facebook profile. Rosenbaum and colleagues' (2010) study of focus groups revealed that authentic self-presentation seems to be one of the main self-presentational goals among Facebook users. Participants in a qualitative study conducted by Haferkamp and Krämer (2010) also reported that they wanted their profile to convey a realistic image of the self when using a German SNS called StudiVZ. The meta-perception study conducted by Toma and Carlson (2012) showed in detail that physical attractiveness in particular, and the characteristics of friendliness and likableness are presented in an accurate way, while self-enhancement (partly accurate) occurs when it comes to being outgoing, funny and adventurous. This slight self-enhancement is in line with various findings that suggest that although profiles tend to be accurate, they are created in a flattering way (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2010; Lampe et al., 2006; Rosenbaum et al., 2010; Toma & Carlson, 2012). Despite being flattering, Facebook profiles nevertheless seem to represent users as they are and not as they want to be - both from the creator's (Toma & Carlson, 2012) as well as from an observer's point of view. When comparing how people perceive themselves and how they are perceived by observers of their Facebook Profile, Back et al. (2010) found that observer impressions are quite accurate, being closer to profile owners' real self than their ideal self. Similar findings were obtained by Gosling et al. (2007) when comparing the impressions of Profile observers with the way users see themselves and the way they are seen by people who know them.

To summarize, although self-presentation on SNS is more controllable than in FTF situations, the images people want to convey are largely accurate and authentic, though slightly flattering. SNS profiles are created in a strategic way, emphasizing certain characteristics and de-emphasizing others. When looking back at what was outlined regarding the nature of self-presentation in everyday social situations, it becomes clear that *packaging* (Schlenker, 1980) also takes place on SNS, particularly when different audiences are taken into account. It seems likely that accurate self-presentation in the face of an undetermined audience from different contexts of a user's social life might limit self-presentation somewhat to a lowest common demeanor because different social selves have to be brought in line (the profile needs to fulfill several self-presentational goals, see also Krämer & Winter, 2008). The easiest way to bypass this problem is self-censorship, one behavioral tactic to handle multiple audiences on Facebook, as revealed by Lampinen et al. (2009). Other strategies for example comprise the use of friend lists (with different privacy/visibility settings) and the use of

different channels for communication (e.g. switching to private messages instead of using public channels) (Lampinen et al., 2009). Smock (2010) further found that an increasing number of perceived audiences on Facebook is positively associated with the likeliness of deleting inconsistent third party information (see last section).

4.6.2.2 Strategies and Tactics

The question exactly how and by what means Facebook users create the intended impression of accuracy and slight flattery has also been subject to research. A content analysis of Facebook profiles conducted in 2008 by Zhao and colleagues revealed that users' strategies comprise "showing without telling" (p.1825), making implicit identity claims by for example stressing consumer and group identities rather than explicitly telling about their personality. In detail, the impression of popularity was found to be conveyed using friend connections and by posting photos of other users. An impression of well-roundedness was found to be communicated through the display of interests and hobbies and the use of quotes might be indicative of a user's thoughtfulness. In Zhao's et al. (2008) study, the self-description section of the Facebook account was also investigated, revealing that users share highly elaborate lists of their preferences, such as interests, favorite music/movies or books.

But the self-description section of an SNS profile is not the only tool used for impression management. Haferkamp and Krämer (2010) found that users of the SNS StudiVZ chose different elements of their profile carefully to convey a desired impression, for example the profile photo (in line with what was found by Siibak, 2009), which women in particular found important, just like other photos that are posted. Furthermore, personal information (e.g. affiliation) and groups were found to be relevant self-presentational information (although groups were used to express opinions, humor and attitudes rather than affiliations).

There is one aspect whose self-presentational role and relevance seems to have changed over the years: friend lists (public display of connections among Facebook users, see chapter 2.2.2). In 2004, Donath and boyd stated that status and preferences can be inferred from the kind and number of connections a user has. In 2007, this aspect was still assumed to be important (in Ellison et al., 2007). In 2010, however, participants of Haferkamp and Krämer's (2010) study reported that so-called friend-collectors are perceived in a negative way and that friend lists' relevance for self-presentation has decreased for that reason.

4.6.2.3 Impact of Personality Characteristics

As outlined in chapter 4.5, several personality characteristics are assumed to be associated with impression motivation and also with impression construction.

Public self-consciousness (see chapter 4.5.1), which describes a general tendency towards outward-directed self-attention, has for example been found to affect social media use in general. Shim and Lee (2006) revealed that people with a high public self-consciousness have a greater tendency towards photoblogging (in contrast to people with a low public self-consciousness). They use this form of social media in a more extensive and multifaceted way and are more likely to react to other users' comments regarding their own work. Haferkamp (2010) also found impression construction was affected by public self-consciousness, as participants with a high public self-consciousness aimed for a more conscious and less accurate self-presentation wanted to convey a particularly good impression. In line with what was outlined in chapter 4.5.1 and the relationship between public self-consciousness and conformity, Haferkamp found participants with a high public self-consciousness were more susceptible to social comparison via SNS.

To my knowledge, the concept of *self-monitoring* (divided into acquisitive and protective self-monitoring, see chapter 4.5.2) has not been applied to self-presentation on SNS yet. However, one result that might be of importance here is that of Laux and Renner (2002) who found that the tendency towards authentic self-presentation was moderately and positively correlated with acquisitive self-presentation and strongly negatively correlated with protective self-presentation. As authenticity has been found to be a major self-presentational goal on SNS (see previous chapter), it might be assumed that the amount of self-enhancement within that authentic framework would differ depending on a user's tendency towards protective and/or acquisitive self-presentation.

To summarize, several personality characteristics that are considered to affect self-presentation have been found to determine how and by what means people self-present on SNS. Up to this point, there has been no explicit investigation of how these aspects affect the use of the *like*-feature, particularly when considering self-presentation in combination with conformity. This is one aspect the current research aims to catch up on. In the following, both the literature reviews on conformity as well as self-presentation will be summarized and applied to the *like*-feature on Facebook to derive guiding research questions for the empirical studies to follow.

Chapter 5

Comprehensive Summary

The literature review was introduced by presenting *like*-displays on Facebook as the subject of the current research in a broader context. Social network sites have become increasingly popular, with more people using the applications and spending a lot of their time doing so. According to Fogg (2008, see chapter 2) the automated structure as well as the social connections among users (the social graph) provide an ideal environment for large-scale social influence phenomena, mainly by making the actions of users within the network available to other users and thus providing social context.

A few years ago, marketers and third parties started to participate in these spaces (e.g. through the introduction of Facebook Pages, see chapter 2.3), raising the questions if and how they are able to make use of these large-scale phenomena in the form of eWOM and viral mechanisms. The simplicity, the potential reach and the trust among potential consumers on SNS seem to deliver these "on a silver plate" (Svensson, 2011 p. 9). Accordingly, Facebook (and also other social media platforms) have introduced certain features that a) allow users to associate themselves with brands and products (see chapter 2.3) and b) present that association to other users frequently during their everyday browsing experience (see chapter 2.4). As a relevant representation of these mechanisms, the *like*-display is the focus of the current research, largely because of the huge dissemination among users (chapter 2.2.4) and organizations for marketing purposes (chapter 2.3). This openly displayed connection between a user and an organization, brand or campaign expresses a positive evaluation of the respective content, which in turn is visible to other users (see chapter 2.4). Although the preconditions for social influence among users and thus viral processes seem to be perfect, the question arises which mechanisms determine these processes. Is every user equally likely to be influenced? Which aspects affect attitude change or according behavior (e.g. *liking* the page oneself

to allow for viral processes in the first place)? Users on SNS act in a very public space, raising the question to what extent public conformity reactions are limited by this environment.

To approach the question if and by which mechanisms social influence through *like*-displays occurs on Facebook, this thesis draws on two major theoretical constructs from social psychology: social influence and self-presentation.

The first part of the literature review with a focus on social influence aimed to present theoretical approaches and related empirical results that are applicable to the Facebook context as the subject of the current research. Based on what was outlined in chapter 2, it was first defined how social influence is to be understood in the current context: When being exposed to a *like*-display, a Facebook user is confronted with one or more friends' positive evaluation of a subject and/or the opinion of an undefined number of unknown Facebook users (who are not physically present; Sassenberg, 2011) regarding the given subject. Potential reactions include attitude change, behavioral change, both or no changes at all.

Based on these characteristics, a target-centered approach was chosen, focusing on goals for yielding to social influence - as suggested for example by Cialdini and Trost (1998) and Wood (2005). Accordingly, the definition of social influence for the current purpose focuses on the target (in contrast to persuasion; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), as the influencing agents would usually not be aware of being involved in the process (incidental influence, according to Hewstone and Martin, 2012). Further characteristics of the influence process relevant for the current research comprise the potential for group as well as interpersonal processes as well as different kinds of reactions. A review of current research on the subject of social influence on Facebook (chapter 3.2.1) revealed that a lot of studies provide evidence for the occurrence of these processes (often focusing on public reactions in field experiments), while few aimed to investigate the exact underlying psychological processes. In essence, these studies found tie strength (measured via interaction frequency on Facebook) and frequency of Facebook use affected the respective participants' susceptibility to social influence and Knoll (2013) even shed light on the respective mechanisms when revealing that collective connections seem to have a more powerful effect than interpersonal ones. In essence, none of the previously conducted studies fits the current subject of investigation, namely the *liking* of Facebook pages; hence a gap in research can be noted, not only with regard to the subject itself but also with regard to the depth of investigation regarding psychological mechanisms in the respective situation. Accordingly, there is uncertainty about which theoretical approaches are appropriate and applicable here. A review of commonly used theoretical approaches to computer-mediated communication (chapter 3.2.3) revealed a prior focus on anonymous communication, either assuming that social influence is

not possible due to lack of social cues (RSC), or focusing on relationships that do not originate online and take time to develop (SIPT) or putting emphasis on categorical information which suggests that social influence online is merely a group process (SIDE). Consequently, there is also a gap regarding theoretical psychological approaches to research in contemporary online environments such as social network sites. To investigate these gaps, a strategy undertaken by Fogg (2008) as well as Weiksner, Fogg and Liu (2008) was adapted for the current purpose by reviewing classical concepts of social influence and testing their applicability within the Facebook environment.

In doing this, a framework was put together and presented that comprised four goals which were assumed to lead an individual to yield to social influence (manifested by different kinds of reactions) along with those factors that affect social influence depending on which goal is salient. First, different kinds of conformity reactions were outlined (chapter 3.3.1) and characterized by two extremes that are not mutually exclusive (Turner, 1991): a person showing public conformity although he/she does not truly believe in the behavior (public compliance, Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) and a person undergoing a genuine change in attitude (and according behavior), called private acceptance. Applied to the Facebook environment, private acceptance would indicate the respective user was truly persuaded by the content of a Facebook page, leading to a change in or development of a new attitude, for example towards a new product and its qualities. A public behavior on Facebook would indicate that the user *likes* the respective page. As Kiesler and Kiesler (1970) noted that an observable behavior as a consequence of conformity is not equal to public compliance, it cannot be derived whether a user superficially *likes* a page (e.g. to please others) or whether he/she *likes* a page because he/she is convinced of its content. To distinguish these consequences of conformity, the underlying goals of the target need to be taken into consideration (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), something that is addressed by the first guiding research question:

GRQ1: Which goals for conformity are relevant to social influence processes regarding *like*-displays on Facebook?

An extensive literature review revealed four basic goals for yielding to social influence (chapter 3.3.2). The goal of accuracy and the goal of affiliation represent aspects covered in the most common conceptualization of social influence processes, namely informational and normative influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Social influence processes based on the goal of accuracy imply that the observed behavior of others is indicative of what is right; hence, yielding to social influence enhances the chance of a right decision, reaction or behavior (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). It is assumed that this leads to a genuine and thus permanent change in attitude (e.g. Turner, 1991), independent of the source because the conformist is persuaded by the content of the communication

itself (Kelman, 1958, 1961). Applied to *like*-displays on Facebook, a user could be motivated to make a right choice in terms of finding/buying a high quality product or supporting the "right" cause, represented by the respective Facebook page. The *like*-display would then be indicative of which campaign or product meets these criteria, because a lot of others have evaluated it positively by *liking* the page. While social influence based on the goal for accuracy is assumed to lead to private acceptance, the goal of affiliation is often associated with a superficial and temporary change in attitude and/or behavior, compliance (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Kelman, 1961), because it is based on the need for rewards or the fear of rejection by the influencing agent (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1958; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). As a consequence, this form of influence is expected to occur only when the influencing agent is present or will learn of the conformist's evaluation (Kelman, 1961). On Facebook, this aspect might refer to the potential consequences of publicly *liking* a page, for example one might *like* a page to impress someone represented in the *like*-display, without being truly convinced of the content. Or someone might refrain from *liking* a Page as a result of a small number of friends presented in the *like*-display because he/she thinks the topic is unpopular and others will make fun of that. As the need for popularity was found to be an important predictor of social network site use (Utz, Tanis & Vermeulen, 2011), this aspect might be crucial for *like*-behavior in this environment as well. The third goal, which was described by Prislin and Wood (2005) as representing another aspect of normative social influence, is that of positive self-evaluation. Conceptualizations by Kelman (1958) as well as within the framework of social identity theory (e.g. Turner, 1991) were presented that ascribed social influence processes to a self-defining, positive relationship towards the influencing agent (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Prislin & Wood, 2005), resulting in a more permanent change in attitude which is not dependent on surveillance as long as this relationship is salient (Kelman, 1961). Applied to Facebook *like*-displays, this might imply that a user develops a positive attitude towards the content of a Facebook Page because a good friend or an important group (or a representative of one) has already *liked* it. The respective attitude towards the topic along with *liking* the Page would then strengthen the positive self-image that is connected to that person or group. In contrast to social influence processes based on the goal of affiliation, it would not be important in this case whether the person shown in the *like*-display would notice the *like* or not. Finally, the goal for cognitive consistency was outlined separately from that of positive self-evaluation, describing how inconsistent attitudes towards the influencing agent and the object of evaluation cause attitude changes in terms of social influence in the course of dissolving a negatively perceived tension state (Prislin & Wood, 2005). Just like influence based on the goal of positive self-evaluation, this process is assumed to be dependent on the target's relationship with or attitude towards the influencing agent and not dependent on his/her surveillance but on the quality of that relationship and the strength

of the respective attitude (e.g. Walther et al., 2012). On Facebook, the *like*-feature only allows a positive relationship between O and X, as *liking* something always implies a positive evaluation of the respective object. But there are certain inconsistencies that might emerge within these limits. A) A person whom the target does not like might *like* a page that contains content which the target approves of or does not know; as a consequence, a negative attitude towards the page's content might emerge to avoid inconsistencies. B) A good friend of the target *likes* the page of a product which the target does not like at all; as a consequence, the product attitude and/or even the attitude towards that person might change. C) If a disliked person *likes* an unknown or similarly unpopular product, the target's attitude and/or behavior should not change at all.

As these considerations illustrate, every motive outlined in the literature review has the potential to become relevant on Facebook. However, the characteristics of the medium (which will be summarized in more detail in the following paragraphs) suggest certain trends: Accountability in connection with public evaluation seems to be strongly connected to processes based on the goal of affiliation. The latter might thus be - in contrast to prior studies on anonymous online environments - of particular relevance for social influence when users are confronted with the evaluation (friend-displays) and reactions of peers from our offline life. However, in contrast to offline social influence exerted by those peers, the respective information is more easily accessible and available on Facebook see chapter (2.4).

Different approaches have been reported to provide evidence for these motives and to observe them in research, although according to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), the qualitative nature of these typologies of processes that often co-occur make empirical proof difficult. The authors state that the goals for yielding to social influence qualify for serving as idealized types that are not likely to occur in their pure form in real settings. However, there have been numerous approaches to detect and investigate these goals for yielding to social influence, e.g. by varying and observing different kinds of reactions (in terms of persistence, publicness and accountability) and/or by varying different impact factors which are assumed to be more or less influential, depending on which goal the influence process is based (e.g. Kelman, 1958; 1961). A similar approach will be undertaken in the present thesis, by determining influence factors for social influence and making the relevant derivations about underlying conformity motives.

GRQ2: Which situational and personal aspects affect conformity elicited through *like*-displays and in which ways?

Several impact factors were described in chapter 3.3.3 that are assumed to be constant on Facebook, such as personal and visual anonymity (neither of which are common on Facebook, see also chapter

3.3.3.1) as well as accountability (which is regarded as high on Facebook). However, one aspect which can vary on Facebook is the publicness of a reaction. Empirical research on this topic suggests that publicness generally increases conformity (e.g. Asch, 1951 in Turner, 1991); however, this may be dependent on which goal for yielding to social influence is salient. One might assume that publicness is of particular relevance when the target is concerned with affiliation, implying that with regard to other goals, differences between public and private reactions should be less accentuated. But as results obtained by Lee and Nass (2002) suggest, publicness of evaluation can even increase conformity in anonymous, unaccountable situations. For Facebook this implies that a public reaction in the form of *liking* something has to be interpreted with care in regard to which goal it reflects on and that both public and private reactions are relevant when investigating social influence. In addition, the question arises as how public the *liking* of a page is perceived to be in terms of whether targets consider potential observers. As a second impact factor, the relationship towards the source was discussed (chapter 3.3.3.2), which is assumed to play a role for the strength of social influence based on several motives for conformity. As relevant characteristics of the relationship, tie strength, positive orientation and similarity were discussed; in general all were positively associated with social influence. Applied to Facebook, the impact of individuals shown in a *like*-display may differ depending on whether the target is closely associated with that person, likes that person or perceives that person as being similar to him-/herself. Furthermore, *like*-displays may also show different numbers of people and also unknown Facebook users. Empirical evidence (e.g. Steffes & Burgee, 2009) suggests that, possibly depending on which goal is salient, tie strength, positive orientation or similarity might interact with the number of people shown in the *like*-display. The third impact factor for social influence discussed in chapter 3.3.3.3 is the ambiguity of the situation, characterized by the kind of task and the target's prior knowledge as well as opinion. It is assumed that preference tasks are more ambiguous and thus elicit stronger conformity reactions (e.g. Allen, 1965 in Insko et al., 1983). Furthermore, the respective goal may affect this process, e.g. a goal of accuracy might be more relevant for preference tasks while conformity in unambiguous situations might reflect a goal for affiliation. The action of evaluating and/or *liking* Facebook pages mainly represents a preference task with no objectively right choice or solution to a particular problem. However, as no "right" solution exists, *like*-displays might communicate some form of subjective validity (Festinger, 1954), indicating which topics or products are generally approved of. The second aspect contributing to the ambiguity of the situation is the target's prior knowledge about the respective topics. Research suggests that the more difficult it is to obtain an acceptable solution to a task, the more strongly people conform (Coleman, Blake & Mouton, 1958). By implication, this aspect is mainly associated with objective tasks where a right solution exists. However, when thinking about topics on Facebook Pages, prior knowledge of the target might

also have an effect regarding conformity reactions by increasing the complexity of the evaluation situation because extensive processing takes place (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Furthermore, the target's prior opinion towards the topic of evaluation was assumed to affect social influence processes based on consistency theories (presented in chapter 3.3.3.3), just like positive orientation towards the source. On Facebook, users are likely to be confronted with Pages about topics they already know as well as unknown topics. In the first case, the existing attitude might affect social influence processes. The final impact factor for social influence that was outlined, is the number of influencing agents (3.3.3.4). Here, different complex experiments gave contradictory results: Campbell and Fairey (1989) found that fraction size in particular is relevant when it comes to normative influence (determined via differences in public vs. private assessment), while results obtained by Bond (2005) only suggests a small correlation for both normative and informational influence when it comes to public responses. For private responses, a negative relationship was found in settings that were assumed to elicit normative influence. Finally, as outlined in chapter 3.3.3.4, group as well as interpersonal processes have to be taken into account when it comes to fraction size as for example the effects of interpersonal attraction might disrupt those elicited by the number of influencing agents.

Regarding potential public reactions, further considerations have to be given to the possibilities of *liking* a Page because of its relevance for both practical application and theoretical development. Regarding the first, it was already outlined in chapter 2.3.1 that viral processes are essential for marketing purposes and that Facebook indeed holds a great potential for these. However, for online content to "go viral", public reactions from users are required to spread it. As outlined earlier, classical conformity research is concerned with both public and private reactions. In the context of viral processes however, public responses are of particular relevance. Apart from the practical implications, *liking* as a public reaction is also considered to be a complex process from a theoretical perspective, due to the fact that the situation on SNS differs from that of classical social influence experiments and also typical face-to-face situations (see also chapter 3.4) regarding the potential audience. Consequently, the third guiding research question is concerned with the interplay of conformity and self-presentation:

GRQ3: How do self-presentational goals on Facebook affect conformity processes regarding *like*-behavior?

On SNS, the process of impression management has been subject to a lot of research and has been found to play a vital role in users behavior, because of the specific conditions. The current literature review of impression management or self-presentation started with an overview of theoretical conceptualizations and empirical findings from face-to-face settings (chapters 4.1 to 4.5) to embed

empirical findings and theoretical approaches to self-presentation on SNS into that framework (chapter 4.6).

Self-presentation or impression management can be understood as the attempt or action to control the impressions that others gain of the self (chapter 4.1). In contemporary social psychological research the process is understood to be an "essential component of social interaction" (Leary, 1995, p.3) - rather than intended deception about the nature of the self, impression management represents a form of packaging information for effective social interaction. Depending on the context, a different part of the self is communicated to the public. SNS provide a largely asynchronous, mediated environment where this packaging can theoretically be undertaken in a very controlled and reflected way (Ellison et al., 2006; chapter 4.6.1.1). Furthermore, they represent a very public environment with largely undetermined audiences (chapter 4.6.1.3), which is assumed to render impression motivation in general very highly, indicating that self-presentation is a foreground agenda of public behavior on SNS, shaping interaction to a large extent (e.g. Haferkamp & Krämer, 2010). Previous studies on self-presentational means on SNS have investigated various profile elements, such as friend lists, self-description or photos (see chapter 4.6.2), but have not explicitly focused on *likes*. *Likes*, however, meet the criteria of commonly-used self-presentational means according to the findings of Zhao et al. (2008): users show rather than tell. As *likes* can be used to communicate associations and preferences (e.g. for products such as TV shows or beverages, see chapter 2.3.4), it seems likely that *liking* a Page might fulfill self-presentational purposes. Based on these results, the following summary and application of the aspects presented on the subject of this thesis will be based on the assumption that *liking* represents a form of self-presentation (however, the assumption will still be tested in the empirical part, see study 1). Accordingly, self-presentational goals and strategies have to be taken into account when investigating *like*-behavior as a public conformity reaction.

Self-presentation in general (not just online) is assumed to be undertaken for two basic reasons (e.g. Baumeister, 1982; Leary, 1995; see chapter 4.2): to please the audience or to construct one's self-image. The first motive for self-presentation is strikingly similar to the goal of affiliation as a cause for conformity (gain approval or avoid rejection), while the other motive is more self-related, stressing the aspect that self-presentation is assumed to contain a certain authenticity (rather than deception; e.g. Leary, 1995), so that public self and private self are brought into line. The characteristics of SNS as a self-presentational environment are assumed to affect the salience of respective goals (e.g. Krämer & Winter, 2008): due to the undetermined and potentially broad audience, the goal of pleasing the audience becomes difficult to pursue, as the relevant preferences are unknown. Hence, self-construction as a self-presentational motive may become more important than the motive of pleasing the audience. In accordance with this, self-presentation on SNS has been found to be very

authentic (e.g. Lampe et al., 2006; see also chapter 4.6.2.1). Nevertheless, the audience seems to play a vital role in impression management on SNS, particularly when it comes to impression construction. As outlined in chapter 4.6.2.2, the actual strategies and tactics of how people present themselves are largely affected by two factors: the self-image (actual and desired) and the audience (e.g. Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The latter comprises target values and prior knowledge about the self-presenter. Not only is self-presentation assumed to be shaped to the audience's preferences to gain approval (target values), but it is also limited by the pressure to be consistent with what the audience already knows (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). On SNS, where a user's social network consists of anchored relationships, the audience is very broad and undetermined regarding their states of knowledge and preferences (chapter 4.6.1.3). Deception on SNS network sites becomes very unlikely, as the potential audience consists of several members who can unmask this deception by providing conflicting information. But not only shaping self-presentation to gain approval becomes difficult; the self-presenter also has to consider which information certain audience members are not allowed to know (chapter 4.6.1.3). For example, users have been found to conduct self-censorship as a tactic to handle multiple audiences (Lampinen et al., 2009). Consistent with that, authentic self-presentation on SNS is very common (chapter 4.6.2.1). Applied to the *like*-feature, it might also be assumed that the audience characteristics of SNS restrict conformity behavior. For example, a user might consider who else might see the action and reflect on whether there were audience members who could disapprove of it. Unlike in less complex face-to-face situations or classic conformity situations, ingratiation through conformity might thus be less likely because is not the only person who might observe the respective behavior. In that sense, it is more likely that disapproval of the content of the action is feared (as it might seem inconsistent with audience knowledge or preferences) rather than the act of conformity itself (an issue described for example by Cialdini, Braver & Lewis, 1974 in Mummendey et al., 1995), because of the assumed incidental nature of the process (chapter 3.1). It has further been discussed how acquisitive and protective self-presentational preferences may manifest themselves and it has been decided that in the context of *liking* as a consequence of conformity, protective self-presentation will be focused on. This is supported by Arkin's (1981) suggestion that protective self-presentation is more likely in situations in which the audience is undetermined, as is the case with SNS.

The aspect of different motivational processes for self-presentation is closely connected to the last part of the review on self-presentation (face-to-face as well as on SNS), the role of certain personality characteristics. In face-to-face contexts, those discussed in chapter 4.5 have not only been assumed and been found to affect the likeliness of self-presentation but also how self-presentation is undertaken, particularly the tendency towards conformity. People with a tendency towards protective self-presentation are assumed to be more likely to integrate conformity behavior into their self-

presentational portfolio (e.g. Lenox & Wolfe, 1984). Likewise, people who score highly on public self-consciousness seem to pursue the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience (rather than self-construction), as suggested by results obtained by Schlenker and Weigold (1990 in Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). However, it has not been explicitly stated by previous authors to which process of conformity these assumptions apply. Taking into consideration the importance of audience reactions for both protective self-presenters and people with high public self-consciousness, it seems likely that they refer to the goal of affiliation. This is supported by the observation made earlier of similarities between the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience and the conformity goal of affiliation. Regarding SNS, previous research on self-presentation has barely considered this relationship either, as most results refer to how the presented personality characteristics relate to the use of certain features (which show that at least two of the presented aspects, public self-consciousness and self-efficacy) affect how people create and fill in their SNS profiles. The only result that can be drawn upon at this point is Haferkamp's (2010) finding that users with high public self-consciousness tend to pursue a less accurate self-presentational strategy, being particularly susceptible to social comparison information (Haferkamp, 2010).

The current discussion of the impact of the self-presentational audience on SNS as well as personality characteristics raises the question to what extent conformity goals may be overridden by self-presentational goals when it comes to *like*-behavior. The relationship between conformity and self-presentation from a theoretical point of view has been presented in chapter 4.4. It was outlined that while self-presentation first was considered to be a side-effect of public conformity, from a self-presentational perspective, conformity can also represent a self-presentational tactic. Based on the aforementioned parallels between the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience and the conformity goal for affiliation, one might even assume that it is indeed the same process. In "classic" situations where the influencing agent eliciting conformity and the self-presentational audience overlapped completely, the underlying process might have been relatively clear. However, the specific characteristics of SNS as well as the potential salience of other (self-presentational and conformity) goals need to be taken into account: Whether self-presentational issues affect conformity processes should be dependent on the respective underlying goal. With regard to conformity and *like*-behavior, no particular assumptions regarding the underlying motive can be made (earlier in this summary, sample cases for all the aforementioned goals were presented). With regard to self-presentation however, empirical results and theoretical reflections suggest that self-construction might be more important than pleasing the audience (this might be dependent on the self-presenter's personality, respectively). Considering this, it becomes clear that self-presentational goals and conformity goals

might not match in every situation (e.g. it seems to be the case with third party observers (Braver, Linder, Corvin & Cialdini, 1977 in Turner, 1991)).

As a result, conflicts between these goals might emerge or, to place the focus on conformity, self-presentational goals might determine whether public conformity takes place, depending on which conformity goal is pursued. One might for example think of a situation where the conformity goal of accuracy is pursued and the *like*-display is indicative of a product's quality. Still the user might decide not to publicly *like* the page because he/she thinks of individual audience members who might disapprove (pleasing the audience would be the respective self-presentational goal). Another example is a situation in which the conformity goal of affiliation is pursued and a user is thinking about *liking* a Page as a result of the *like*-display to gain approval from the respective friends shown in the display. However, the user notices that on a long-term basis the respective brand or product is inconsistent with his/her self-image. To prevent creating inconsistencies between publicly constructed and private self-image, he/she decides not to *like* the Page.

To summarize, the SNS environment represents a situation in which the target / self-presenter might find him/herself in the middle of two (competing) sources of social influence, the influencing agents from a conformity perspective and the self-presentational audience from a self-presentation perspective - along with respective goals and concerns. Of course this only applies to public conformity reactions, while for private reactions, self-presentational concerns should not play a role. Here, the respective conformity goals - with the exception of affiliation - are assumed to be crucial determinants of evaluation, curiosity, attitude change etc. These mechanisms (including influence factors for conformity behavior and self-presentation) are illustrated in Figure 6 for private reactions and in Figure 7 for public reactions respectively.

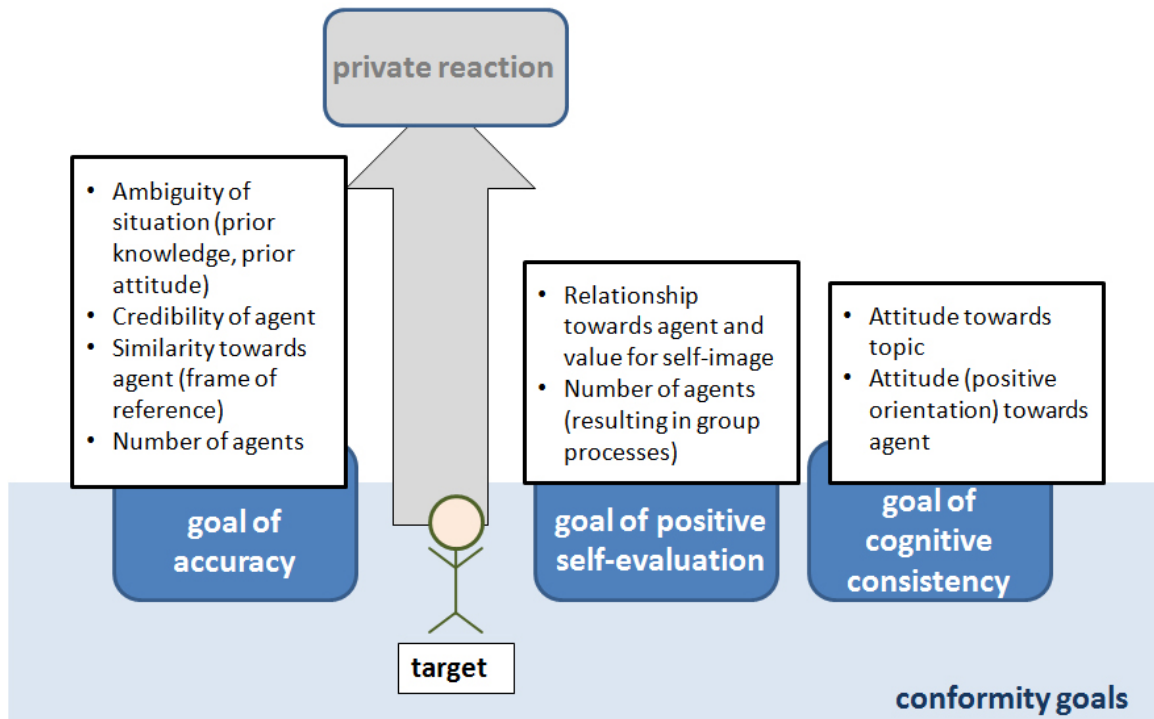


Figure 6. Conformity Framework for Private Reactions

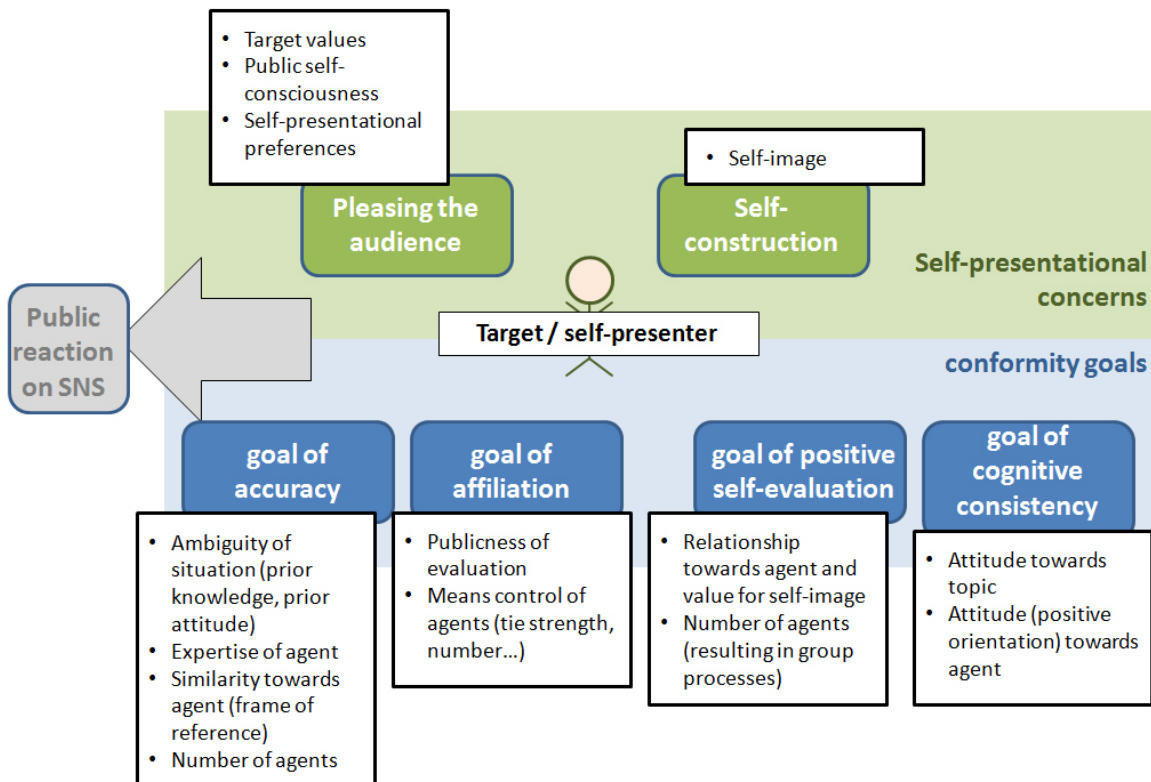


Figure 7. Conformity Framework for Public Reactions

In the following chapters, the empirical part of the current thesis will be presented. Over the course of three empirical studies, the aforementioned guiding research questions will be addressed in more detail. The different studies each place different foci on one or more of the three main guiding research questions, while at the same time using different methodological approaches to investigate social influence elicited through *like*-displays on Facebook.

Chapter 6

Study 1: Explorative Investigation of Conformity Goals, Influence Factors and Self-Presentational Concerns

6.1 Introduction and Research Questions

The first study of the present thesis will approach the mechanisms of social influence in combination with self-presentation regarding *like*-displays on Facebook Pages in an exploratory way. As outlined in chapter 3.2.1, there exist several empirical studies that suggest the presentation of other users' evaluations and actions within social media environments such as Facebook affect users' perceptions of the respective object of evaluation and their behavior (e.g. Muchnik et al., 2013; Bak & Keßler, 2012). However, there is a lack of empirical research concerning the particular topic of *likes* and, with the exception of Knoll (2013), the respective underlying psychological processes of the observed social influence effects. Hence, it is unknown which motives drive social influence or which situational aspects affect it respectively (except for the finding that Facebook use and tie strength are positively associated with the strength of the effect, see Bond et al., 2012; Egebark & Ekström, 2011; Hagen & Hofmann, 2013; Muchnik et al., 2013). Apart from that, the interplay of social influence mechanisms and self-presentational concerns on social network sites when it comes to public behavior has not been covered in prior research. As outlined in the comprehensive summary, both self-presentational as well as conformity goals have to be considered when hypothesizing about potential processes. It thus seems reasonable to use a qualitative approach as a first exploratory step towards this complex (and largely uncovered) topic to better understand the process and to generate hypotheses for the

following studies. In line with that, study 1 will address all three of the guiding research questions outlined in the comprehensive summary to the same extent.

Although empirical evidence suggests that *like*-displays elicit social influence (e.g. Egebark & Ekström, 2011), the particular case of like-displays regarding Facebook Pages has not been covered in research yet. Hence, the first goal is to determine the relevance of *like*-displays for users who observe a Facebook Page. In accordance, the first research question reads as follows:

RQ1: Are *like*-displays taken into account when evaluating Facebook Pages?

Both empirical evidence and theoretical approaches suggest that there are several potential outcomes of conformity: On the one hand, there is what is often called private acceptance (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Turner, 1991), which refers to a genuine change in attitude and probably according public and private behavior. The other extreme of the scale is often referred to as compliance (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Turner, 1991), a superficial change in behavior without the accompanying change in attitude. The respective underlying motive to a large extent determines which kind of reaction is shown (e.g. Kelman, 1958; 1961). Although studies on social influence on SNS have not covered the persistence of attitudes, the results at least suggest that there can be private (e.g. Bak & Keßler, 2012) as well as public reactions (e.g. Bond et al., 2012; Egebark & Ekström, 2011). In accordance with those results and against the background of what was outlined in the initial paragraph about the lack of research on this topic in particular, the following research question is stated:

RQ2: What are potential reactions towards *like*-displays (fan- and friend-displays)?

In chapter 3.3.2, four major goals for conformity reactions were outlined and it was already speculated in the comprehensive summary how these might be reflected in a conformity situation caused by *like*-displays. Regarding the goal of accuracy (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1961), the *like*-display might be indicative of the quality of the represented product or the appropriateness of an idea expressed through a Page. For the need for affiliation to become the basis of social influence, the influencing agent is required to learn about the target's evaluation (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1958; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), hence it applies to public reactions. Respectively, the goal for affiliation might bring users to *like* a Page to impress another person who already *liked* it or the user might avoid *liking* Pages that seem to be unpopular. The goal of positive self-evaluation (e.g. Kelman, 1958; Turner, 1991) might come into play if for example a valued person or group is presented in the *like*-display and a conformity reaction contributes to strengthening the positive self-image that is associated with the influencing agent. The fourth goal, that of cognitive consistency (e.g. Prislin & Wood, 2005) might for example become relevant if a disliked person *likes* a favored or unknown Facebook Page or vice versa in which case the negatively perceived tension might be resolved

by changing the attitude towards the Page's content in accordance with the attitude towards the influencing agent. The aforementioned possibilities raise the next research question, which refers to the role of the different motives in social influence processes when it comes to the *liking* of Facebook Pages (GRQ1). Considering the methodological approach used in the present study, there exist two ways in which the aforementioned motives might be expressed by participants (directly and indirectly), hence RQ3 will be divided into two sub-questions:

RQ3a: What information is perceived as being contained in *like*-displays (friend- and fan-displays)? What motives for conformity does it reflect?

RQ3b: What motives for conformity are explicitly mentioned to affect attitude and/or behavior?

The literature review further contained an extensive discussion of several situational aspects that affect social influence, depending on which motive is pursued. The first study aims to answer the question, which of those need to be considered when it comes to *liking* Facebook Pages (GRQ2). As outlined in chapter 3.3.3.2, the source of social influence plays a crucial role for the direction and strength of the effect regarding basically all of the previously discussed motives. On Facebook, empirical evidence suggests (chapter 3.2.1) that tie strength in particular is important for the effect; however, also similarity and attraction were discussed as potential influence factors (e.g. regarding the goal of positive self-evaluation and the goal of cognitive consistency). *Like*-displays on Facebook Pages may contain a variety of respective information, for example they may show other connected users (friend-displays, showing close friends or acquaintances) or a number of anonymous Facebook users (fan-display). As a consequence, the respective research question is also divided into two sub-questions:

RQ4a: Do (potential) social influence effects differ between friend- and fan-displays?

RQ4b: Is the relationship towards the presented friend(s) shown in the friend-display of relevance for social influence processes?

Another situational aspect, discussed in chapter 3.3.3.4, is the number of influencing agents. Here prior research found a general positive relationship to the strength of effect; however, several aspects need to be considered that might disrupt this relationship, such as the underlying conformity motive (Campbell & Fairly, 1989) or the kind of influencing agent (e.g. friends, see Egebark & Ekström, 2011). Hence, for the present purpose, the following research question not only aims to investigate a potential linear relationship between number of influencing agents and conformity, but to detect which characteristics of the relationship towards the influencing agent might interact with the number of influencing agents (as suggested by findings obtained by Steffes & Burgee, 2009):

RQ5: How does the number of fans/friends shown in the *like*-display affect social influence processes?

The last aspect found to be of relevance for social influence processes (depending on the underlying motive and also rendering respective motives salient in the first place) is the ambiguity of the situation (chapter 3.3.3.3). Three characteristics of the situation were discussed of which the kind of task was found to be stable, with *liking* or evaluating a Facebook Page representing a preference task. In this sense, *like*-displays may be indicative of a subjective validity rather than objective validity. In this sense, the target's prior knowledge was suggested as another aspect that affects ambiguity against the background of what was outlined with regard to conformists' need to reduce ambiguity in unknown or unfamiliar situations (e.g. Festinger's social comparison theory). Finally, prior opinion was considered to be relevant against what was outlined in the context of the goal for cognitive consistency (as for example Osgood & Tannenbaum's (1955) congruity theory suggests that strong attitudes are less susceptible to change; see chapter 3.3.2.4). In accordance with these reflections, the final research question that focuses on conformity is:

RQ6: How do knowledge about and prior opinion on the topic of the Facebook Page affect social influence processes?

It was already noted in the comprehensive summary (chapter 5), that anonymity (or *nonymity*) is regarded as a stable characteristic of the environment and will thus not be varied (like it was done in other studies). This aspect however will be of relevance when investigating the relationship between self-presentation and conformity (GRQ3), as suggested in the following research questions that are concerned with public conformity reactions in form of *liking* something.

In chapter 4.3.1 it was outlined that certain situational characteristics determine impression motivation, rendering impression management either a foreground or background agenda of social behavior (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000), though always part of the latter. It was further discussed that SNS provide an environment in which impression motivation is potentially very high and impression management is likely to become very strategic (Ellison et al., 2006), suggesting that almost every public behavior is likely to become the subject of self-presentational agendas (chapter 4.1). Because of this and because of the fact that *liking* seems to correspond with a common self-presentational tactic on SNS (show rather than tell; Zhao et al., 2008; see comprehensive summary), it seems reasonable to assume that *liking* a Facebook Page may be done out of self-presentational concerns. However, there are also other reasons to consider (e.g. a desire for information in the Page's News Feed), which is why the first research question concerned with self-presentation (GRQ3) focuses on this aspect:

RQ7a: Is self-presentation a motive for *liking* a Facebook Page?

Provided that *liking* represents a form of self-presentation on Facebook, self-presentational goals have to be taken into account when considering conformity in this context. In chapter 4.2, two major self-presentational motives were outlined: pleasing the audience and self-construction. For the first aspect, the potential (or imagined audience, see chapter 4.6.1.3) is of central relevance, just as it is for the conformity goal of affiliation. In contrast to classic conformity studies, however, the self-presentational audience and the influencing agent of the assumed conformity process based on *like*-displays do not correspond: The potential self-presentational audience is much broader and undetermined than the people shown in the *like*-display (who might not even be part of that audience), as discussed in the comprehensive summary. This raises the question to what extent the motive of pleasing the self-presentational audience might disrupt conformity processes (for example users might decide to conduct self-censorship by not *liking* a Page, see Lampinen et al., 2009), in case the undetermined audience is considered. The second self-presentational motive is that of self-construction, describing a need for public behavior to be consistent with one's self-image (see chapter 4.2). When this goal is salient, the user might be more likely to *like* Pages that he/she really approves of, independent of what is shown in the *like*-display. Against the background of these considerations, the last research question reads as follows:

RQ7b: Do self-presentational motives prevent users from *liking* certain Facebook Pages?

6.2 Method

The (IRB-approved) qualitative procedure used to approach the aforementioned research questions integrated a think-aloud protocol (Ericsson & Simon, 1980) into a semi-structured interview. For the think-aloud part, participants were asked to look at different Facebook Pages that contained *like*-displays, while verbalizing their thoughts accordingly. Based on Pulakos and Schmitt (1995), the interview protocol was comprised of situational (in-depth questions regarding the presented profiles) as well as experience questions (regarding participants' experience with the *like*-feature in the past). Details will be outlined in the following .

6.2.1 Sample and Procedure

Ten students from a media psychology program (50% female) participated in the study, after being recruited via bulletin boards (online and on campus) in January and February 2012. There were no particular preconditions for participation, except that interviewees were required to have a Facebook

profile and to be active and regular users of the SNS. The ten participants had been Facebook members for one to four years ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.22$) and used Facebook on a daily basis, between 20 minutes and 3.5 hours per day ($M = 77.78$ minutes, $SD = 63.57$).

On arrival at the lab, participants were informed about the general topic of the study and the details of the interview procedure. With respect to the general topic, participants were told the aim of the study was to assess their impressions regarding the design of different Facebook Pages. To avoid demand characteristics, the particular relevance of the *like*-displays for the purpose of the study was not pointed out. Participants further were notified about the fact that at some point during the interview they would be asked to log into their Facebook account to be able to observe the presented Pages exactly the way they would face them, if they had encountered the Pages in the course of their own daily Facebook browsing activities. Before the beginning of the procedure, participants gave their written consent on participation and the fact that the interviews would be audio-recorded.

The interview procedure (for details on the interview protocol see next section) started out with some general questions about participants' Facebook usage. After the first interview part, participants were asked to log into their Facebook account and in the following they were shown two different kinds of stimuli: Four different Facebook Pages and one Recommended Pages Ad. With regard to each of the four Pages, participants were asked to verbalize their first impressions about different elements of the Page which was complemented by additional questions of the interviewer. Subsequently, participants were shown a Recommended Pages Ad in which - based on a Facebook algorithm - an overview of a small number of seemingly random Facebook Pages is displayed, showing only the title, profile photo and a fan- or friend-display. After answering further questions with regard to the Pages shown in the Recommended Pages Ad, participants were asked to log off their Facebook account.

Following that, participants answered some additional interview questions about their *like*-behavior and past experience with the *liking* of Facebook Pages.

Finally, participants filled out a short questionnaire to assess demographic information (age, gender, major, semester). Overall, the procedure took between 70 and 90 minutes (see table 2), depending on how much participants elaborated on different aspects of the profile. After the interview, participants were informed on the real purpose of the study, explaining to them why they had been asked to log into their Facebook account. Cookies were deleted after every session. All interviews were conducted by the same interviewer to avoid interviewer effects. The respective interviewer memorized the protocol in detail and conducted two trial interviews prior to starting with the first participant to be able to adjust to participants' behavior during the think aloud procedure, e.g. to skip those questions

Table 2: Procedure of Study 1

| | Task | Duration (approx.) |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Interview Part I | Participants answered interview questions about Facebook usage | 5 - 10 minutes |
| Think Aloud: Facebook Pages | Participants verbalized their impressions regarding each Page and its respective elements; additional in-depth interview questions were answered | 45 - 60 minutes |
| Think Aloud: Recommended Pages | Participants chose one of the presented Ads and gave reason for their choice; additional in-depth interview questions were answered | 5 minutes |
| Interview Part II | Participants answered interview questions about their use of and experience with the <i>like</i> -feature | 10 minutes |
| Questionnaire | Participants filled out questionnaire about demographic aspects | 5 minutes |

that participants had already answered in the course of describing their impressions of the Page. An overview of the whole procedure is provided in table 2.

6.2.2 Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was created on the basis of the research questions and the outlined theoretical background regarding conformity and self-presentation.

The first interview questions addressed participants' general Facebook use, without any particular reference towards the *like*-feature (time spent on Facebook; how long they have been using the platform; most frequent activities; whether and if so, how they update their profile information; which people of their network are able to access their posts and whether there existed information that they would not share on Facebook).

During the first part of the think-aloud procedure, participants were asked to verbalize what they thought of each presented Facebook Page as a whole and the associated topic. The interviewer then asked additional questions about how likely participants would be to *like* that Page (or not) and for what reasons. After this, participants were instructed to verbalize the impressions they got regarding different elements of the Page (Page header, profile picture, photos displayed in the overview of the photo section, textual information, and *like*-displays). The interviewer addressed all elements on every

Facebook Page presented so that there was no indication of the real purpose of the study to avoid demand characteristics. After verbalizing their thoughts, participants were asked several in-depth questions about each element, such as its relevance for participants' impressions and intention to *like* the Page. Participants were asked to explain why they thought the respective element of the Facebook Page elicited that particular impression/reaction and if it would evoke a different impression/reaction if it contained different information (e.g. a different profile picture, more textual information, more photos, more/different friends displayed as fans).

During the second part of the think-aloud procedure, when shown the Recommended Pages Ad, participants were asked to choose one Page of the ones presented that they would look at in more detail or that they would be willing to *like*. Further, they were asked to explain their decision.

The last interview part consisted of questions that addressed participants' use of and experience with the *like*-feature in more detail (e.g. what kind of Facebook Pages are *liked* most often, whether they could recall a situation in which they *liked* a Facebook Page and for what reasons, what they think of the *like*-feature in general and whether they would *like* something if none of their friends could see this action).

6.2.3 Presented Material

During the first part of the think-aloud procedure, participants were shown four Facebook Pages (for an overview see table 3). Two drinks and two television shows were chosen to cover different kinds of topics. Of each kind of topic, one product was very popular and one product was rather unknown to assess differences in reactions towards known and unknown topics and towards different numbers of fans and friends who are fans. Popular topics were Coca Cola and The Simpsons while the unknown topics were Black Can 28 (a locally distributed energy drink) and Modern Family (which had not been broadcast in Germany at that time). The last two topics were assumed to be unfamiliar to the sample but not downright unknown so that there was the chance of participants' friends being displayed as fans.

During the interview period, Facebook introduced the Timeline for Facebook Pages (Axon, 2012). After about half of the interviews had been conducted, the respective Pages successively switched to the new layout. This was considered not to be crucial to the success of the study, since the new layout displayed the *like*-displays even more prominently than the old layout. In contrast to the old layout, however, the Page displayed less static information on the main Page (e.g. the "About"-section was not directly visible), hence the interview procedure had to be adapted accordingly. No changes were made in the interview procedure with regard to the *like*-displays as the actual topic of the study.

Table 3: Presented Facebook Pages in Study 1

| | Known | Unknown |
|----------------|---|---|
| | Coca Cola | Black Can 28 |
| Drink | Total number of fans (January - February 2012) | 37.5M - 41M 73k - 85k |
| | known by | 10 out of 10 participants 1 out of 10 participants |
| | <i>liked</i> by | 0 out of 10 participants 0 out of 10 participants |
| | Number of participants' friends displayed as fans | 2-16 0-3 |
| | | |
| | The Simpsons | Modern Family |
| TV Show | Total number of fans (January - February 2012) | 38.5M - 47M 5.5M - 6M |
| | known by | 10 out of 10 participants 1 out of 10 participants |
| | <i>liked</i> by | 2 out of 10 participants 0 out of 10 participants |
| | Number of participants' friends displayed as fans | 13-48 0-7 |
| | | |

Table 4: Example for Paraphrasing

| Original Transcript | Paraphrase |
|---|---|
| I: Is the impression your friends would get if you <i>liked</i> the Page important to you? P1: Well, not necessarily with Coca Cola. It depends. . . I don't know. . . on the product. | Regarding Coca Cola, the friends' reaction in response to P1 <i>liking</i> the Page would not be important to P1. That would be dependent on the product. |
| I: Can you give an example, where it would be more important? P1: Ok, so I'm a vegetarian. And, I don't know, if there we such a Page and I would <i>like</i> that, then this tells more about me than if I <i>liked</i> Coca Cola. Because through that people would come to know about me, that's something personal. | One topic, with regard to which the friends' reaction would be important to P1 is the fact that P1 is a vegetarian. If P1 were to <i>like</i> a respective Page, that would tell more about P1 than if he/she were to <i>like</i> Coca Cola. Through that, people would come to know about P1 because it is personal. |

The Recommend Pages Ad was called up by typing the word “test” (a random search query which was the same for all participants) into the search bar and clicking the “see more results” option, after which the Ad was presented on the right part of the results Page. The Ad contained an unspecific number of recommended Pages.

6.2.4 Data Analysis and Coding Frame

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The parts of the interviews that addressed elements of the Facebook Pages not of interest to the study were cut from the transcripts before transcripts were paraphrased for the purpose of summarization and explanation (Mayring, 2007). For an example see Table 4.

Paraphrases were subject to qualitative content analysis using MaxQDA, a software program used for “systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame” (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). The analysis followed a partly inductive and partly deductive approach (Schreier, 2012). Main categories of the coding frame represented topics addressed within the research questions, while subcategories were mainly

extracted from the material in a deductive way by selecting relevant content and assigning it to the respective main category (Schreier, 2012). Every paraphrase represented a coding unit and codes (main as well as subcategories) were allowed to overlap.

Overall, 15 main categories were defined: Facebook use, first impression of the Page (RQ1), information contained in fan-displays (RQ3a), (potential) reactions to fan-displays (RQ2), reasons for (potential) reactions to fan-displays (RQ3b), aspects affecting (potential) reactions to fan-displays (RQ4-6), information contained in friend-displays (RQ3a), (potential) reactions to friend-displays (RQ2), reasons for (potential) reactions to friend-displays (RQ3b), aspects affecting (potential) reactions to friend-displays (RQ4-6), purpose of *liking* a Page (RQ7a), preconditions for *liking* a Page (RQ7b), own *likes* (RQ7a), self-presentational audience (RQ7c). Because of the nature of the coding scheme, in which fan- and friend-displays were coded separately, RQ4a (concerned with differences between fan- and friend-displays) will already be implicitly addressed in the process of answering the other RQs. A summary of the findings up to that point will be provided when explicitly addressing RQ4a in the results section. An additional main category referred to the Facebook Page at hand: type of Page (e.g. familiar/unfamiliar topic, drink/TV show), meant to allow identifying overlaps with other categories to address RQ6 (concerned with the impact of participants' prior knowledge and opinion about the topic of the Page). The definition of the main categories was conducted in an iterative process, during which several other researchers were consulted and the coding frame was adapted accordingly several times. The codes constituting the respective subcategories contained factual codes (e.g. time spent on Facebook, topic of the Facebook Page) as well as referential codes (e.g. information contained in the fan-display: product is popular). Finally, 10 - 20% of the interview material (paraphrases) was extracted and cross-coded by a second coder, applying the existing coding frame. A satisfactory inter rater reliability of $\kappa = .74$ was obtained (Landis & Koch, 1977).

6.3 Results

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked about their general use of Facebook and their general attitude regarding privacy and the self-presentational nature of their profile. Only two participants regarded the impression their Facebook profile might convey to others as particularly relevant, while for the other participants this was of secondary relevance (e.g. because they use Facebook mainly in a passive way, e.g. browsing other users' content or they use private channels, such as the chat). All participants stated to update their profile on a rather irregular basis. Updates mostly comprised status updates or photos. When talking about their general privacy attitude, all participants seemed to be at least minimally concerned with this aspect because all of them confirmed

their profile to be only accessible to friends. In addition, all of them stated to put thought into what is publicly posted about them and addressed different strategies of ensuring that information they consider private or inappropriate is not being published, e.g. by not posting this information at all, by switching to private communication channels on the platform or by assigning friends to different groups. To summarize, all participants seemed to have a similar, minimally concerned attitude about what impression the information they post on Facebook might convey to others, although in general they seem to use the platform rather passively and/or privately.

Regarding their *like*-behavior (addressed at the end of the whole procedure), all participants knew the *like*-feature and had *liked* between 2 and 100 Pages themselves ($M = 36.00$, $SD = 36.99$), mostly music-related topics (five participants, seven mentions) or television shows (four participants, five mentions), but also movies and books (two participants, two mentions), actors (one participant, one mention) and other topics (three participants, three mentions). Most occasions for *liking* something were that participants noticed that friends had *liked* it (seven participants, eight mentions) or while setting up their own profile when signing up for Facebook (seven participants, nine mentions). Other ways to notice future *likes* were external sources (e.g. band homepages; three participants, three mentions) and Facebook Recommended Pages Ads (two participants, two mentions).

In the following, the research questions outlined above will be addressed individually (except for RQ4, as outlined before). When reporting numeric values, two aspects will be considered: The number of participants addressing a certain aspect and the overall number of mentions (as every participant saw several stimuli, a lot of aspects were mentioned repeatedly).

6.3.1 Consideration of *Likes* for Evaluation Purposes (RQ1)

To address RQ1 about the extent to which *like*-displays are taken into account for the evaluation of the Facebook Pages and its content, it was assessed whether participants unpromptedly addressed *like*-displays when talking about their general first impression of the Facebook Page and the things they noticed first about it. Five out of the ten participants named the friend-display (mentioned once per person) and four participants addressed the fan-display at least once while giving their first impression (overall five mentions).

*"Well ok, you can see the Simpsons and I noticed right away that a lot of my friends have liked that. I like the show as well, that's why this appeals to me immediately."
(female, 21)*

"Ok, one knows the Simpsons of course. I like them too. And the first thing I looked up here was how many of people have liked the show. Or, to be honest, I checked whether I have liked it because I wasn't sure." (male, 25)

6.3.2 Potential Reactions towards Like-Displays (RQ2)

Participants mentioned various potential reactions towards *like*-displays: *positive/negative impressions*, *trying the product*, *interest/curiosity* and *liking* were addressed for both kinds of *like*-displays.

The reaction mentioned most often was a *positive impression* caused by the presented *like*-display (mentioned by nine participants for fan-displays (21 mentions) and by eight participants with regard to friend-displays (15 mentions)). A *negative impression* emerged occasionally (mentioned by three people for fan-displays and by two for friend-displays, one mention per person), hence it seems that both friend- and fan-displays left participants largely with a positive impression.

"The fact that there are so many people who have already liked that, leaves a positive impression for a start." (female, 21)

"Considering 38 million fans, I find two friends rather poor." (male, 22)

Trying a product (drink or television show) was another frequent reaction, mentioned by seven participants for fan-displays (15 mentions) and by six participants for friend-displays (16 mentions).

"Like I just said, there seem to be some people who know it and when they even took their time to like the Page, they must really like it and this may cause me to try it on occasion." (female, 21)

Interest/curiosity was each mentioned by five participants for both fan- (nine mentions) as well as friend-displays (seven mentions).

"If I didn't already know it, it would probably be of interest to me based on the like-display." (male, 27)

Liking the Page was more likely to be a reaction towards friend-displays (five participants, ten mentions) than towards fan-displays (three participants, one mention each). Further, *liking* the Page was only mentioned for topics that were already familiar.

"Well, I think this [fan-display] would contribute to me liking the Page." (female, 21)

"Yes, because I know the product and I drink it on a regular basis. And on impulse I'd say if ten of my friends have already liked it, I would click the like-button as well." (male, 19 years)

With regard to friend-displays, two additional kinds of reactions were addressed: *examining the Page in more detail* (mentioned by three people, four mentions) and *asking the respective friends about the product* (addressed by five participants, ten mentions).

"I would definitely choose this show [among the presented ads] because I don't know that either. And the same person as before has liked it. In that case, I would have a look at the Page and read out the information to maybe watch it on occasion." (female, 24)

To summarize, *like*-displays seem to be able to elicit both private reactions (impressions, interest/curiosity) as well as public reactions (*liking*, asking friends). Although the pattern of potential reactions seems to be similar for both fan- and friend-displays, a larger variety of potential reactions was mentioned with regard to friend-displays. Further, *liking* was only mentioned as a potential reaction when the topic was already known while reactions that indicate further investigation (asking friends, examining the Page, trying a product) were predominant with regard to unfamiliar topics

6.3.3 Motives for the Acceptance of Social Influence (RQ3a + RQ3b)

Both fan- and friend-displays were described to contain a variety of information (RQ3a) about the product/topic, about the Facebook Page and also about the friends presented in the friend-display, not of all which are necessarily associated with a conformity reaction.

One kind of general information about the product communicated through *like*-displays is how *popular* a product is (addressed by eight participants regarding fan-displays (18 mentions) and by three participants regarding friend-displays (three mentions)).

"5,411,382 people like that. Maybe it is popular after all." (female, 20)

Like-displays may also convey information about the *prominence* of a product, as five participants (nine mentions) addressed this aspect with regard to fan-displays, while three did so for friend-displays (three mentions).

"...based on this number, one can picture how well-known that is and how many people know that, makes you want to know more about it." (male, 25)

The *quality* of a product is another aspect communicated through *like*-displays, mentioned 13 times by six participants in the context of fan-displays and twice in the context of friend-displays.

"But if that was one of my best friends [in the friend-display] I would think that it had to be good." (female, 21)

Like-displays also allow conclusions about the *target group* of a product, as described by three participants for fan-displays (five mentions) and by four participants (seven mentions) for friend-displays.

"... that it appeals to many people, also to many different people." (female, 21)

The last aspect mainly associated with information about the topic is the impression that based on the *like*-displays the product (show, drink) might *meet one's own taste*, which was mentioned once by two participants for fan- and friend-displays respectively.

"If so many people have liked it and if there is something like a majority taste, then it could appeal to me as well." (male, 19)

One additional issue somewhat associated with the product is the *feeling of having missed something* based on what is presented in the *like*-displays. It was addressed by five participants regarding fan-displays (11 mentions) and by two participants in the context of friend-displays (three mentions).

"... of course I would think I must have been living behind the moon because I haven't heard about it or something like that." (male, 25)

Other information about the product that is communicated through *like*-displays is the age of the product and its *regional distribution*. As those are considered not to be associated with conformity reactions, they will not be elaborated on at this point.

Regarding the Facebook Page itself, the *like*-displays may tell if a Page is the *official one* (mentioned by four participants (seven mentions) for fan-displays and by two participants (two mentions) for friend-displays. This aspect is considered to be relevant for conformity as participants stated to only want to *like* official Pages.

"When I like something on Facebook want to like the official Page that is being maintained, which provides information for my news feed. So I think the number [of fans] is relevant in this context." (male, 22)

Further, information about other users' behavior in the form of *like*-displays may tell something about *like-norms* on Facebook in the sense of what kind of products/Pages people tend to *like*. This issue was addressed by three participants (six mentions) in the context of fan-displays and by two participants in the context of friend-displays (two mentions).

"I would definitely be surprised if even more people – especially my friends – had liked it. That wouldn't necessarily change my opinion about the Page but it would cause astonishment regarding the presence of Coca Cola on Facebook." (male, 22)

There are two additional aspects that were only mentioned in the context of friend-displays because it was concerned with information and knowledge about the particular people presented. As the contexts in which those were mentioned are associated with social influence in the broader sense (based on the literature), these aspects will also be outlined shortly. Five participants (eight mentions) described to *have learned something new about their friends' interest* (e.g. a common interest).

"For some of them I didn't know that they like it, but I'm glad because I like it too and when you have a common interest, that leaves a positive impression." (female, 21)

Six participants (14 mentions) further described a feeling of *consistency* regarding their attitude and knowledge about the topic and the respective friends, either regarding a positive or a negative attitude.

"I think these are actually people that are close to me or that I can identify with. This somewhat... yes, that somewhat supports my view. This is something that I like as well. It's nice that my friends like it too." (male, 23)

"Well, basically that's the same pattern. I neither really care about the product and nor, even if that sounds weird, about the people. In comparison to those people that mean a lot to me. And because of that I think 'Just forget about it.'" (male, 23)

To summarize, most of the information in *like*-displays is concerned with the product, but they also convey information regarding the Page or the respective friends that are shown in the displays. While some of the mentioned motives for yielding to social influence based on the *like*-displays seem to be easily associated with a particular motive derived from the literature (e.g. *like*-displays communicating about the quality of a product in order to make an accurate decision), most of the aforementioned results need to be discussed against the literature background in more detail to be able to derive conclusions. Hence, a more extended discussion of which motives for social influence can be found here will be provided in the discussion section.

Apart from investigating which information relevant to social influence processes is derived from the *like*-displays, participants explicitly mentioned several motives (RQ3b) for them reacting the way they had previously described that are not reflected in the information *like*-displays contained (as outlined in the previous section).

Both with regard to fan- as well as friend-displays, participants stated they did *not want to be the only one* (to e.g. *like* a Page). This issue was addressed for fan-displays by two participants (two mentions) and once by a single participant in the context of friend-displays.

"I think you don't want to be the only one to like that Page." (female, 21)

A reason that was only mentioned in the context of fan-displays was that the number of fans indicated a *"right" choice* (two participants, two mentions).

"Because after all there are 40 million people who like that, they cannot be that mistaken." (female, 24)

Further, only with regard to friend-display, three participants described how they would follow a social orientation and felt like they wanted to *tag along*.

"I think this has to do with tagging along. Since so many friends have liked it, I feel I want to like it myself." (male, 19)

Apart from reasons to conform to the behavior and evaluation of those who have *liked* a Page, one participant described *individuality* as a reason not to conform and another participant stated to want to *support a Page* when the number of fans is rather low.

6.3.4 Effects of the Relationship towards the Influencing Agent (RQ4a + RQ4b)

RQ4a was concerned with the question whether social influence processes differed depending on whether the display showed friends or an anonymous number of fans. In the process of answering RQ1 to RQ3, this issue was already addressed several times because fan- and friend-displays were coded separately. For the purpose of answering RQ4a, a summary of the findings regarding the differences outlined in the previous paragraphs will be provided.

Both kinds of displays have been addressed by about half of the participants when describing their first impression, indicating that they are both taken into account to the same extent when evaluating a Page (outlined in the context of RQ1 in section 6.3.1).

With regard to potential reactions (RQ2, in chapter 6.3.2), it was found that for several kinds of reactions, there did not seem to be a difference in the extent to which they are elicited through *like-displays* (e.g. trying a new product, curiosity). But while fan-displays were mentioned more often when describing a general positive or negative impression, friend-displays were addressed more often when it comes to *liking* a Page. Further, only with regard to friend-displays, participants described that they would examine the Page in more detail or ask the respective friends about the product.

When reporting the information contained in *like*-displays (RQ3a, chapter 6.3.3), several differences between fan- and friend-displays were already indicated. To begin with, fan-displays were mentioned more often when it came to popularity, prominence, quality, the feeling of having missed something, the question whether the Page was the official one and the perceived *like*-norm. In contrast to that, friend-displays were described more often to be indicative of the respective target group. Further, only with regard to friend-displays, participants felt they conveyed information about the respective friends and communicated a feeling of consistency regarding what they knew about the friends and the topic of the respective Page.

With regard to motives for the acceptance of social influence (RQ3b, chapter 6.3.3), the impression that the *like*-display is indicative of a right decision was only addressed when talking about fan-displays, while only friend-displays seemed to be able to address the motive of tagging along.

To further investigate the role of the source when it comes to friend-displays (RQ4b), several relationship characteristics were found to be of relevance for conformity as participants addressed several aspects (regarding their relationship towards those people and regarding the composition of the group) that they felt affected their reaction towards the friend-display and their impression of the Page.

Nine participants (27 mentions) found the *tie strength* of the respective relationship to be relevant for their impression/reaction, all of them agreeing that the impact is stronger when the friend-display showed strong ties (e.g. good friends in contrast to acquaintances).

In detail, those reactions with regard to which participants found tie strength to be of relevance are the general impression (six participants, eight mentions), asking friends about the product (three participants, six mentions), interest/curiosity (two participants, three mentions), *liking* a Page (two participants, two mentions) and trying a product (one participant, two mentions).

"I usually don't talk to that person and... I don't know... with friends, with really good friends you often exchange experience. And you often talk about television shows and things like that and because of that I would be more likely to ask them." (female, 20)

"If those were real friends of mine, it would definitely be different. Or people that I'm closer to." (female, 21)

Another aspect that was perceived as being relevant for social influence was *knowledge about the respective friends* (e.g. about their preferences), mentioned by six participants. Aspects that were covered here concerned friends' preferences and sense of humor, their current or past whereabouts, and their age.

"[I would choose Australia Day among the presented ads]. A friend of mine, a fellow student, she has liked the Page. And I know that she has been to Australia." (female, 20)

"When I see that a lot of my friends like it and when I look at those friends, we share a similar sense of humor, then I would probably like it as well, I maybe would watch the show." (female, 24)

It is noticeable that all six participants (all mentions except for one) referred to television shows, suggesting that knowledge about friends was of less relevance when evaluating drinks. The particular reactions to which knowledge about the friends was considered to be relevant were watching the show (three participants, four mentions), curiosity/interest (two participants, three mentions), the general impression (two participants, two mentions) and asking the respective friends about the show (one participant, one mention).

The next relational aspect addressed by six participants (seven mentions) was concerned with the composition of the group, such as variety of friends, number of friends in contrast to tie strength and potential prevalence of certain groups.

"If there are also people that are not part of my inner circle of friends but that I know from somewhere, it shows that this thing [the topic] is not only of interest to a certain group that shares certain similarities, but that it is of interest for a larger majority." (male, 27)

"Here, there are a lot of people and... well, if there were 3-4 people that are very important to me, this would have a stronger impact than a large number of miscellaneous people." (male, 23)

"If that was a different product targeted solely at men, I would see that only men have liked it. That would elicit a different impression in me, I would think that the product is not of interest to me." (female, 21)

In accordance with the quotes presented here, the reaction for which the composition of the group of friends was perceived as being of relevance (if explicitly mentioned) was a general impression (five participants, five mentions).

The last issue that participants addressed that concerned their relation to or knowledge about the presented friends is their *attitude* towards those friends, mentioned by three participants (seven mentions). To summarize, participants agreed that a negative attitude towards the people presented in the friend-display would potentially affect social influence processes in a negative way, or even elicit reactance.

"My impression is a negative one, because the friends of mine who have liked the Page, with the exception of one person, I don't care about them and my experience with them is rather negative. [...] I think I would not like the Page, solely because those people have already liked it." (male, 19)

The majority of reactions addressed in the context of attitudes refers to the general impression regarding the topic (three participants, five mentions).

To summarize, participants mentioned several relational aspects that affect social influence reactions, such as tie strength, knowledge about friends, attitude towards them and the composition of the group. While tie strength is considered to be relevant for a lot of different kinds of reactions (particularly a general impression and asking friends about it), just like knowledge (particularly trying a product and curiosity), attitude and the composition of the group only seem to affect the general attitude. Further, it was noticeable that knowledge regarding the respective people only was addressed when talking about television shows, suggesting that a common taste or sense of humor is of relevance here, while with regard to drinks, this did not play a role at all. Regarding the composition of the group, several aspects were described that distinguish group (e.g. many different friends, only men) and interpersonal processes (e.g. some good friends being more influential than a large number of random people). This aspect will be elaborated on in more detail in the course of the discussion.

6.3.5 Effects of the Number of Influencing Agents (RQ5a + RQ5b)

Regarding RQ5a, eight participants (26 mentions) considered the number of fans and eight participants (12 mentions) considered the number of friends to be relevant for their own reaction.

In general, most participants agreed that a larger number of people might elicit a stronger reaction from them, as seven participants (29 mentions) confirmed this for fan-displays and six participants (11 mentions) agreed on this for friend-displays.

There were two derivations from this pattern, indicating that a smaller number might be more influential: One participant described to be more likely to *like* a Page if it had a small number of fans in order to support them. In accordance, he even stated that he felt his own *like* to be less significant in the face of a large number of previous *likes*.

"If there were very few fans, I might think about pushing that." (male, 27)

"I would tend to not like it if the number of fans was very high. Because I would think it wouldn't make a difference. When they already have 40 million likes, they don't need me to like it anymore." (male, 27)

The other exception from the pattern described initially was one participant who stated to dislike mainstream topics. Accordingly, he found a smaller number of fans more appealing than a large number.

"I actually find this slightly more likeable. By having less fans than Coca Cola... I mean, this is still a lot, but far less in comparison. This makes it somewhat likeable."

(male, 23)

Another issue that was noticeable was already outlined when addressing RQ4b, namely that the number of friends might interact with relational characteristics, such as tie strength. In this regard, a smaller number of friends might be more influential if they were close friends.

"Here, there are a lot of people and... well, if there were 3-4 people that are very important to me, this would have a stronger impact than a large number of miscellaneous people." (male, 23)

To summarize findings for RQ5, most participants seem to agree that a larger number of fans or friends tend to elicit a stronger reaction from them. However, two exceptions from this pattern were addressed: the feeling of not being able to make a difference with a single *like* when facing a large number of previous *likes* and an aversion of mainstream topics. Apart from that, findings indicate that relational aspects might be more relevant than numbers when it comes to friend-displays.

6.3.6 Effects of Familiarity with and Attitude towards the Topic (RQ6)

As suggested by the literature that was outlined in the context of RQ6, prior knowledge about a topic might affect social influence processes. This was addressed by all participants with regard to fan-displays (26 mentions) and by nine participants with regard to friend-displays (22 mentions). The exact characteristics of those effects are quite complex, hence in the following the overlaps between the type of product (familiarity) and those aspects already outlined when answering RQ1 to RQ5 will be analysed.

Regarding the question if the *like*-displays are taken into account for a first evaluation of the Page (RQ1, section 6.3.1), it is noticeable that most friend-displays were mentioned with regard to the familiar television show, where participants were confronted with up to 16 of their friends. One person noticed the friend-display first on the Page of the familiar drink. Hence, the friend-displays seemed to be most eye-catching with regard to the familiar or even popular products. For the fan-displays the picture was a little more diverse: While two people addressed fan-displays regarding the unfamiliar

television show and one noticed it first on the Page of the familiar television show, two others found the number of fans of the familiar drink noticeable.

Regarding the information contained in *like*-displays (RQ3a, section 6.3.3), certain differences between familiar and unfamiliar topics were observable. In general, the informative potential of *like*-displays seems to be greater for unfamiliar topics. For example, participants who mentioned the feeling of having missed something and the impression that the product would be likely to meet one's own taste only did so with regard to unfamiliar topics. In line with that, for popularity, quality and prominence, either the number of participants who mentioned this issue or the respective number of mentions was larger in the context of unfamiliar topics for both fan- and friend-displays. One example would be quality being mentioned by five participants (nine mentions) as information contained in the fan-display of the Page of an unfamiliar topic in contrast to three people (four mentions) mentioning it in the context of a familiar topic (two people and no people for friend-displays respectively). A difference from this pattern occurred with regard to information on the Facebook Page (official Page or not), the *like*-norm and the information about friends. Those aspects were mostly addressed in the context of familiar topics. To summarize, regarding an unfamiliar topic, the *like*-displays seem to communicate mostly information about the topic. In contrast to that, when participants are already familiar with the topic, they derive information about the Page, respective norms or the constellation of friends they are confronted with.

Apart from familiarity, one's own *attitude* towards familiar topics (*valence* and *strength*) were considered to be of relevance for social influence processes, as described by four participants (four mentions) with regard to fan-displays and by six participants (six mentions) when talking about friend-displays.

Here, most participants agreed that if the prior attitude is strong, *like*-displays are becoming increasingly less relevant for evaluation of the topic or for *liking* the Page (confirmed by three participants regarding fan-displays and by four participants regarding friend-displays).

"At most, if I didn't know it at all, then I would say let's have a look at that. But when you are already into it and have an opinion about it, then it [like-display] doesn't make a difference." (female, 21)

In the context of fan-displays, one participant further described to want to push a topic that he is fond of by *liking* the Page if the number of fans is low (as already outlined when answering RQ5, section 6.3.5).

Regarding friend-displays, two additional aspects were addressed. One participant stated that the friend-displays contained more *information about the people* than about the product (television show) when a prior attitude is given.

"Well, I already know that the show is good. In this case, it [friend-display] tells more about the people." (female, 24)

Another participant was asked to imagine his reaction if a friend-display (actually presented on one of the Pages) that showed two people he did not like would be presented along with a product he liked and he described an inconvenient state of *inconsistency*.

"I think that would cause a conflict, I wouldn't know whether to like the Page or not."
(male, 19)

To summarize findings for RQ6, most participants found *like*-displays were less important when they already had an opinion about the topic. Further differences were concerned with whether the friend-display communicates information about the product or the people, the urge to support a well-liked topic with a low number of fans and an (imagined) feeling of inconsistency when attitude about the friends and the topic are not in accordance.

6.3.7 Motives for *Liking* a Facebook Page (RQ7a)

To investigate the relationship between self-presentational motives and potential social influence processes, it was first looked into what purposes *liking* a Facebook Page might fulfill to find out if self-presentation was of relevance.

Indeed, the purpose mentioned most often (17 times) and by all participants was that they *like* a Page to *tell others about oneself* (e.g. interests, personality).

"Others get a picture of me based on what I like. That is...you see similarities and differences right away." (male, 25)

"I think that's ultimately what this is about, self-presenting through these profiles."
(male, 23)

"Well, I think the things that you like, they should...ehm, you should really be fond of them. It wouldn't tell anything about me if I liked a million random things." (female, 21)

"Liking that television show would tell something about me to others, that I get the humor and that I'm a fun person." (female, 21)

Apart from the general purpose of telling about oneself, participants frequently stated telling about oneself through *liking* on Facebook might be useful for *expressing and identifying common interests* with friends (mentioned by six participants, seven mentions).

"A lot of people watch that show, right? And, I don't know, may they're like "Cool, [name] watches that, too!." How can I describe that? [...] It's not really appreciation, but maybe common interest." (female, 20)

Other purposes for *liking* that were mentioned in the course of the interviews were not associated with self-presentation and most of them were far less salient: *Receiving information through the news feed* (five participants, 11 mentions), *gaining access to the Page's content* (two participants, two mentions), *supporting the campaign* (two participants, two mentions) and *taking part in a lottery* (one participant, one mention).

Apart from assessing purposes of *liking* a Facebook Page, it was asked whether participants could imagine their *like*-behavior to change if no one on Facebook was able to see their action. While four participants (four mentions) stated they would not change their behavior, six participants (six mentions) felt that *liking* would not make any sense if no one would be able to see it.

"I would probably like less, because it's mostly about self-presentation when you like something. If no one could see that, you wouldn't have to do that because you know for yourself what you like. And you really don't use those Pages, it's all about showing others what you like." (male, 25)

6.3.8 Self-Presentational Motives Disrupting Social Influence Processes (RQ7b)

As participants were not asked directly whether self-presentational concerns would prevent them from showing conformity, preconditions for *liking* a Page that were mentioned in the course of the interview (e.g. when being asked whether participants would *like* the presented Pages) were coded to investigate whether those motives that are associated with *liking* Facebook Pages outlined in the last paragraph even may prevent social influence processes (RQ7b).

Aspects mentioned in this context reflect characteristics of the topic and the Page, other people's opinion about the topic, participants' own relationship towards the topic and their *like*-behavior.

Regarding one's own relationship towards the topic, participants described that in order to *like* a Page, they had to be *concerned with the topic* (nine participants, 24 mentions), they had to have a *positive attitude towards it* (nine participants, 23 mentions), they had to be *familiar with the topic* (see also RQ3a; nine participants, 16 mentions) and the topic had to *fit their personality* (four participants, five

mentions). Some even explicitly associated these aspects with potential social influence processes and how that would affect them.

"I'm not that much of a fan of the Simpsons that I would like the Page because so many friends have liked it." (female, 24)

"I don't really like the show and because of that, I wouldn't like the Page." (female, 21)

"... but it has to fit me, and this is not something I care about and because of that I would not get carried away [by the information shown in the like-display] and like the Page." (female, 21)

Characteristics of the topic that are considered as preconditions for *liking* something are the *product category* (five participants, 13 mentions) as well as the fact that a topic is *distinct* (five participants, six mentions) and *not controversial* (two participants, three mentions). The product category was addressed most often when talking about the presented Pages that were concerned with drinks and most participants agreed they would not *like* drinks, e.g. because that does not tell anything about their personality or because of the feeling of general non-involvement with this product category.

"This is about emotional involvement you have with the topic, which is different for example for movies and television shows in contrast to a product you can buy at every corner, like it is with Coca Cola." (male, 23)

"It's just a drink and not a band you can be a fan of, just a drink I like to drink, but no one has to know that on Facebook." (female, 24)

"I think it's because this is more distinct [a television show], not everybody knows it. [...] This way, you yourself are somewhat special, I don't know, avant-garde, you know something that not everyone knows. I think that always plays a role, but of course you wouldn't publicly say it that way." (male, 23)

"But I think on Facebook in particular, information like your political orientation, this doesn't belong there." (female, 24)

Another precondition for *liking* something is the *opinion of Facebook friends*, both those displayed as fans in the friend-display (meaning that friends have *liked* the topic before, two participants, four mentions) and those who might see participants' action (the *self-presentational audience*, two participants, four mentions).

"My female friends like this show, but I also have a lot of male friends on Facebook who would probably make fun of me if they saw me [face-to-face]. Not in a vicious way, but because of that I'd think I'd better not like the Page." (female, 21)

Furthermore, characteristics of the Page were perceived as being of relevance for three of the participants' (five mentions) decision to *like* something. Particularly the questions whether the Page is the *official one* (as already mentioned in the context of RQ2). In addition, one participant mentioned that the *Page design* has to be appealing.

The last aspect considered to be of relevance for potential restraints of social influence processes is *participants' own like-behavior*, which was described to be able to prevent *liking* by six participants (eight mentions), e.g. because participants do not tend to *like* very often in the first place.

In the context of RQ7b, participants mentioned several aspects that would prevent them from *liking* something or that have to be fulfilled before *liking* something that reflects the motive of telling others about oneself (RQ7a), such as one's own relation towards the topic (attitude, concern, fit or distinctiveness). It seems that participants use the *like*-feature for authentic self-disclosure which implies certain restraints for showing conformity, although participants do consider if friends have already *liked* a Page.

The aforementioned aspects also reflect issues concerned with the self-presentational audience. Concerns like other Facebook friends' opinion about a topic indicate that although *liking* is meant to authentically reflect one's personality, participants tend to tailor their behavior to an audience by avoiding *likes* that might be controversial or not approved by others.

In addition, participants were asked whether they cared about what others would think of their *like*-behavior. While nine participants described situations in which it would not be relevant for them (17 mentions), six of them also could think of topics with regard to which they would care about others' reactions.

"Not with regard to the Simpsons, I wouldn't care about that. There are other topics which would look weird if I liked them. [...] likes Kärcher Germany [a vacuum cleaner brand]. I don't know, people would probably think 'Ok. . .'. I don't know, that's a stupid example, but I think there are worse things I might like which would really look weird." (female, 24)

To summarize, *liking* a Facebook Page seems to be highly associated with self-presentation and self-presentational purposes, as participants describe to use the *like*-feature to tell others about themselves. Other reasons for *liking* are not as salient, with the exception of receiving information as

one purpose of *liking* a Page. However, participants want their self-presentation (via *like*-behavior) to authentically reflect their interests and personality (associated with the self-presentational motive of self-construction), which might restrain social influence processes. Further, the audience may prevent certain *likes* to happen, because they are not approved of or controversial (reflecting the self-presentational motive of pleasing the audience).

6.4 Discussion

The present study was meant to represent an exploratory step towards investigating the process of social influence elicited through *like*-displays on Facebook, focusing on potential motives as well as influence factors and how conformity relates to self-presentation when *liking* a Page. In the following, the discussion of results against the background of the presented literature and respective implications will follow the structure of the research questions.

RQ1 referred to the question whether *like*-displays are even taken into account when evaluating Facebook Pages (against the background of empirical results that suggest *likes* to affect evaluation and behavior when complementing online content, such as single posts). Participants' first reactions towards the Facebook Pages presented in the present study suggest indeed that *likes* are taken into account, but only a few people named them unpromptedly. Against the background of previous empirical results and theoretical conceptualizations that emphasize Facebook's potential for viral processes (chapter 2), the salience of the *like*-displays here seems rather low. However, it has to be taken into account that for methodological reasons, whole Pages were presented to not give away the actual purpose. But, as outlined in chapter 2.4, *like*-displays are more likely to be encountered in a less information-loaded context, at least when it comes to further content of the respective Page. For example, in Ads and Recommendations, users often only see the Page's name and profile photo. So generalizations regarding the prominence of *like*-displays based on the present results need to be made with caution, also with regard to the small sample. For the present purpose it seems sufficient to summarize that *like*-displays are taken into account when evaluating Facebook Pages and it can already be noted that maybe in future studies the respective context and environment of the *like*-display need to be considered.

Beginning with RQ2 (up to RQ6), the applicability of the presented framework for social influence (chapter 3.3) was investigated, starting with the question how people react to *like*-displays. Results show that private (impression, attitude, trying) as well as public reactions (*liking*, asking friends) were described, depending on which information the display contains and what participants knew about

the topic, e.g. *liking* was only mentioned as a reaction towards friend-displays and only for familiar topics. At this point, only the publicness of a reaction can be observed, while derivations regarding the persistence of those reactions (based on the underlying motive) - which would allow to associate them with concepts described for example by Kiesler and Kiesler (1970), Nail (1986) as well as Turner (1991) - are difficult. For example, a positive attitude induced via *like*-displays may or may not result in a respective behavior (depending on how persistent and strong the attitude is) and in order to answer the question whether a *liking* as a public behavior is a form of short-termed superficial compliance or an expression of a persistent, genuine attitude induced via *like*-displays (private acceptance; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), further results need to be taken into account, regarding underlying motives and influence factors.

To answer RQ3 regarding which goals for yielding to social influence are relevant in the present context, a variety of information was taken into account: which information the *like*-display was perceived to provide and explicitly mentioned reasons for conformity reactions. As mentioned in the results section, a detailed discussion of the findings and how they are associated with the four goals outlined in chapter 3.3.2 requires a more extensive review of the theoretical concepts. Beginning with the goal of accuracy, social influence was described to be based on the need to gain an accurate view of reality and act accordingly (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Turner, 1991) as well as to be able to validate one's own opinions in comparison to that of others (social reality testing, e.g. Festinger, 1954; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Provided that the goal of accuracy is more likely to become salient when reality is ambiguous (Festinger, 1954), the present results can be interpreted in such a way that *like*-displays communicate certain information about the quality of an unknown product (e.g. by suggesting that a large number of fans is suggestive of a right choice), which in consequence might lead a target to gain a positive impression or try the respective product. However, also with regard to familiar products, one aspect was observed that is suggested to be associated with the goal of accuracy, which is the detection of the official Facebook Page, once one has decided to *like* a product. In this case, the *like*-display is assumed to guide the respective action, rather than causing it.

In the context of the goal of affiliation, social influence was described to be based on the need to regulate rewards and punishments provided by others (Prislin & Wood, 2005), in terms of increasing approving responses and avoiding rejections (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In the present study, several aspects were mentioned that are suggested to be associated with these processes. First, the feeling of having missed something may imply a concern to be excluded by others because one is not familiar with a popular topic. Based on the present results it cannot be specified what kind of reaction may follow to that; one might however think of further investigation regarding the unknown topic or asking friends about it (see RQ2). One aspect that was mentioned in the context of actual *like*-behavior was

the notion that one looks to others' *likes* in order to avoid being the only one who *likes* something. This implies a certain fear of negative reactions from others in case the respective topic is not approved of; the *like*-displays in turn might be indicative of how well-approved it is to *like* that particular topic on Facebook. In this case, *like*-displays fulfill a restrictive role rather than being the cause of a public action (or the underlying attitude).

Three additional aspects were mentioned in the interviews that somewhat represent a mixture of affiliation and accuracy goals: *Like*-displays were described to communicate a norm about what people *like* and how present the respective topic is on Facebook. While on the one hand this seems to satisfy informational needs regarding the topic and serves as indicator for what is subjectively valid, it may also be associated with social orientation out of fear of rejection or in hope of approval. The latter in particular was already mentioned in the context of affiliation goals when discussing the motive of not wanting to be the only one to *like* something. As a consequence, depending on how the respective information is interpreted and evaluated, the underlying goal might be affiliation or accuracy. With regard to information about a topic's popularity and prominence, it is suggested that similar processes might operate. While these aspects may be indicators of external or subjective validity and thus appeal to accuracy goals, they might also be associated with the feeling of having missed something, mentioned before in the context of affiliation goals.

One thing that seems noticeable at this point, after reviewing the potential for affiliation and accuracy goals to become the basis for social influence, is the role of affiliation goals in the context of superficial compliance. Yielding to social influence based on the goal of affiliation is often suggested to be undergone not because of the target's true beliefs but because of the trial to please others (Kelman, 1961). Consequently it is often associated with short-termed reactions, lacking an underlying attitude change (Asch, 1955; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Kelman, 1961). In contrast to classical paradigms and also in contrast to expectations based on the generally high accountability andonymity on Facebook (see comprehensive summary), it is observable here that superficial compliance in form of *liking* something in order to gain the approval of others in the particular situation is not really an issue. Affiliation goals are more likely to fuel interest in an unknown topic or guide behavior based on an existing attitude rather than being the origin of that behavior. On the one hand, the context has to be taken into account in order to explain why the effects found in classical studies did not seem to play a role here. As described initially, the influence is incidental (see chapter 3.1); hence, there is no direct request from an influencing agent which was to be declined. Further, the question arises to what extent direct reactions from the people shown in the *like*-displays are expected (or feared) or to what extent other potential audience members are salient, an issue that will be addressed again in the context of RQ7.

The next goal for conformity that was expected to be found is that of positive self-evaluation, which is reflected in the salience of a positive self-defining relationship towards the influencing agent (e.g. Kelman, 1961). A person's own opinions and behavior are brought into line with that of valued others, because this has positive consequences for his/her self-image (Kelman, 1961; Pool et al., 1998). The present results suggest that learning of valued others' evaluations via *like*-displays causes a positive feeling in case one shares the opinion about the topic, because common interests become visible and one's own self-image is supported. Although not explicitly mentioned in this context, it seems likely that the target might feel the desire to express this common interest as well (by *liking* the Page), to further strengthen the associated self-image. The final motive that was outlined in the literature review is that of cognitive consistency, suggesting that prior attitudes – either about the topic or about the source of influence – might cause a negatively perceived tension state that people strive to resolve in case the existing attitudes compete with each other (e.g. Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). Indeed, participants often described a feeling of consistency regarding familiar topics and people shown in the *like*-display and the expressed difficulties in evaluation in case the information was (or was imagined to be) conflicting, indicating that inconsistencies might be resolved by changing attitudes (e.g. towards the topic). Furthermore, it was described how existing attitudes regarding the people shown in the *like*-display might affect the first impression of an unknown product (positively or negatively). In a similar regard, aspects were mentioned that combined consistency goals with that of accuracy: participants derived information about the target group from *like*-displays, e.g. to evaluate how likely a product would be to meet their own taste based on what they knew and thought about the people shown in the *like*-display.

In general, RQ3 can be answered by stating that all four goals for yielding to social influence can be found to some extent when investigating processes of social influence elicited via *like*-displays. Also, the combination of different motives in several of the aspects mentioned in the interviews illustrates a point made by Eagly and Chaiken (1993), who state that the outlined goals and associated processes possess a certain qualitative nature and tend to co-occur, making an isolated empirical investigation difficult. Finding this assumption supported in the present findings, this aspect has to be considered for future studies that aim to investigate social influence processes based on the underlying goals. This aspect also raises questions regarding the exact interplay of different components of the influence process (goals, impact factors, outcomes). Up to this point, there exists only anecdotal evidence and speculations regarding which motive is associated with which kind of reaction and how the process is affected by situational factors; for example with regard to *liking* as a public reaction that triggers viral processes in the first place, there exist several possibilities, which will be summarized at the end of this discussion, once the situational aspects have been discussed.

One of these aspects is the source of social influence. RQ4a was concerned with the question how conformity processes might differ between friend- and fan-displays. Fan-displays seem to play a more important role for unfamiliar topics and accordingly are relevant for first impressions because they communicate popularity, quality, whether it is the official Page and *like*-norms. Looking back at the results for RQ3, one might interpret these findings in a way that fan-displays are of particular relevance for processes based on the goal of accuracy. However, also friend-displays seem to provide important information about unfamiliar topics, such as the target group of the product, an aspect that is associated with the goals of cognitive consistency in combination with accuracy (as outlined earlier). Friend-displays further appeal to the goal of positive self-evaluation (based on what was outlined in the last paragraphs) by communicating common interests. Based on these observations it seems that friend- and fan-displays fulfill different purposes for conformity processes depending on which goal for yielding to social influence is salient (which in turn seems to be dependent on whether the topic is familiar or not). In the context of friend-displays it was further investigated (RQ4b), which characteristics of the relationship (relational aspects) affect conformity processes. Interview participants described tie strength, knowledge, composition of the group and attitude to be of relevance. The majority of these aspects can be associated with different motives, based on theoretical considerations. Tie strength for example is a two-sided construct; on the one hand, it is predicted by the frequency of social interaction because it is positively associated with the amount of information exchanged (Brown & Reingen, 1987). In line with that, participants described they would be more likely to get further involved with a topic or product if there were close friends they could ask about it because they talk to them a lot and because they would not bother weak ties with this kind of questions. This aspect might be associated with all four motives because the interaction frequency increases the amount of information exchanged, be it information about means control, the product or potential common interests (see chapter 3.3.3.4). However, it is also imaginable that close ties are more likely to have means control over the target and the respective relationship is more likely to be relevant for the target's self-concept (indicators of tie strength, see Frenzen & Davis, 1990), which would in turn affect processes based on the goal of affiliation or the goal of positive self-evaluation. One way to further approach this issue is to investigate whether predictors or indicators of tie strength better predict social influence effects, as all studies in the context of Facebook so far were only concerned with frequency of interaction (predictor of tie strength), for example Bond et al. (2012). One might for example think of close ties that are not on Facebook or weak ties that one often interacts with because of a common interest or because other friends do not spend that much time on Facebook; it is thus questionable whether frequency of interaction can predict tie strength (and thus social influence) in a more accurate way than for example perceived closeness. The next relational

aspect found to be relevant for social influence effects is the target's knowledge about the influencing agent, for example regarding sense of humor, preferences or age. As discussed in the context of RQ3, participants stated to derive information about the topic based on what they know about the fans in case it is unfamiliar. This finding is in line with what was reported about the effects of perceived similarity (chapter 3.3.3.2.2) in the literature review. In group contexts it was for example found that shared characteristics increase conformity (Gerard, 1954). In previous theoretical approaches, this aspect has often been associated with processes of social identification (e.g. Turner, 1991), which would be indicative of the goal of positive self-evaluation. However, taking into consideration the context of participants' answers in the present study, consistency/accuracy processes seem to play a role here as well, at least regarding unfamiliar products (see RQ3): Participants mainly mentioned this aspect with regard to television shows but not when talking about the Pages that featured soft drinks, assumingly because the latter is too trivial or because of how one is involved with a drink in contrast to a television show. This in turn supports the assumption that the influence processes are based on the goal of accuracy rather than just positive self-evaluation, because based on theoretical considerations, the content of the evaluation object would not matter for the latter goal. One more aspect that was mentioned, which is in line with concepts outlined in the literature review, is the target's attitude towards the influencing agent. In chapter 3.3.3.2, attraction was defined as positive orientation towards a group or person (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) and has been found to be associated with social influence in group as well as interpersonal contexts. Attraction towards the influencing agents is assumed to play a central role for private acceptance based on the goal of accuracy (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). In group contexts, one could argue that the goal for positive self-evaluation is the underlying mechanism of yielding to the norm of a group one is attracted to (Prislin & Wood, 2005). And finally, attraction could also play a role in the context of cognitive consistency, whereas a prior attitude towards the influencing agent might change or determine the attitude towards the topic (chapter 3.3.2.4). Looking at participants' answers in more detail, it seems that this aspect plays a particular important role when a negative attitude towards the influencing agent is given, which then causes a negative initial attitude towards an unknown topic, which would fit well with the goal of cognitive consistency being the underlying process.

One result that seems to manifest based on the mentioned relational aspects is that interpersonal processes seem to dominate social influence effects in the Facebook environment. Only one exception was observed which clearly emphasized the salience of a group, namely in the context of how the cluster of fans in the friend-display was composed. Here, a group was perceived to become salient, dependent on how homogeneous the cluster was, for example one person mentioned the group of men (as opposed to women), which would be an indicator for the target group of the

product or topic. Similarly, it was reported that a very heterogeneous cluster of fans is indicative of a broad target group. In contrast to that, if certain friends were in the cluster who stand out from the crowd, interpersonal processes would become the dominant mechanism again. The observation that interpersonal contexts seem to be more salient on Facebook than group contexts is in line with what was summarized in chapter 3.2.3: Although the majority of studies on social influence in CMC focus on group processes (for an overview see e.g. Carr, 2010), this approach seems more appropriate for anonymous environments in which categorical information is more salient than interpersonal information (Culnan & Markus, 1987), making group processes more likely. The present results thus support the approach to not focus on classical CMC theories but to draw on theoretical approaches from (interpersonal) face-to-face contexts.

Regarding RQ5 it was investigated how the number of fans shown in the *like*-display affects social influence. In general, findings support the notion of a positive relationship between number of influencing agents and the likeliness for conformity (as suggested by previous findings, e.g. Asch, 1955; Insko et al., 1985; Lee & Nass, 2002). However, there were two exceptions to this pattern that are in line with theoretical reasoning and empirical results outlined in the literature review. First, the effect of number of fans might interact with relational characteristics, for example one close friend might be more influential than several unknown fans (as also found by Egebark & Ekström, 2011). Further, remarks by one of the participants indicate that a very large number of fans may cause reactance because of a general reluctance of mainstream topics. In chapter 4.4 it was outlined how the self-image might affect conformity behavior in case someone does not see his/herself and does not want to be regarded as a conformist (e.g. Baumeister et al., 1979 in Turner, 1991). This aspect of course touches the question of self-presentational goals and how they affect conformity, something that will be addressed when discussing results of RQ7. For the moment it seems reasonable to just state that depending on the self-image and self-presentational goals, a large number of fans may not lead to conformity but to an opposing effect. As only one participant mentioned this aspect, the question arises to what extent personality characteristics might come into play here. For example, in chapter 4.5 two trait variables were described (public /private self-consciousness; self-monitoring) that were assumed to moderate whether a person is more likely to pursue the self-presentational goal of self-construction or whether someone takes into account social comparison information (and is thus more likely to show conformity). Also this aspect will be addressed in more detail after discussing results of RQ6.

Regarding the ambiguity of the situation and how it affects conformity reactions (RQ6), two issues were addressed by participants in the present study: familiarity of and prior attitude about the topic. The remarks participants made about familiarity largely reflect the concept (and respective effects)

of prior knowledge about the topic as outlined in the literature review (chapter 3.3.3.3): Decreased ambiguity (because of familiarity with the topic) seems to reduce the variety of potential conformity reactions (RQ2) and the amount of information communicated through the *like*-display (RQ3). On the one hand that might imply that for familiar topics, the goal of accuracy may become increasingly less important because the user is able to judge a product's/topic's quality, prominence, popularity etc. by him/herself and there is no need to take *like*-displays into account. In line with this assumption, the *like*-displays were less indicative about characteristics of the product for familiar topics, but more indicative of information about norms and also the respective friends (if any were shown). In general, the friend-displays were found to be very prominent and relevant for familiar topics. However, it has to be considered that the familiar topics used in this study were two of the most popular Facebook Pages, hence a lot of friends were shown and it is unclear whether the prominence of the display was caused by the number of people displayed or by the general perceived importance of the respective information. Independent of the question how noticeable the friend-display was for familiar topics and for what reasons, it was observed that participants all were very curious to learn which friends had *liked* a Page. One of the motives for this reaction, derived from other findings of this study, might be the urge to detect common interests, for example to validate one's own opinion or to increase positive self-evaluation (see RQ3). Another observation regarding reactions to familiar topics was that only when the topic was known, *liking* the Page was even an option as a potential conformity reaction. This somewhat indicates that certain preconditions exist for a topic to become the subject of public evaluation on Facebook and that the role of *like*-displays here is to guide that behavior rather than cause it (as was already mentioned in the context of RQ3). The second aspect found to affect conformity effects in the context of ambiguity was prior attitude, in line with what was outlined in the literature review (see chapter 3.3.3.3): Price et al. (2006) found that prior attitude was a better predictor of final attitudes than social influence factors in a conformity situation. Further, theories of cognitive consistency (chapter 3.3.2.4) suggest that the stronger the prior attitude, the less susceptible it is to change (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). Consistent with that, participants in the present study mentioned valence and strength of prior attitudes to be of relevance for conformity behavior. Regarding the first aspect, observations revealed a feeling of inconsistency when participants' attitude towards the topic was not in line with what they saw in the *like*-display (e.g. attraction to the people displayed). Regarding the latter, one participant explicitly stated that the stronger the prior attitude, the less relevant are *like*-displays perceived to be for one's opinion to *like* something. Along with the finding that *liking* was not an option with regard to unfamiliar topics, this is another indicator of the idea that *liking* might be a way of expressing a genuine belief that can be guided but not caused by *like*-displays.

To investigate the interplay between conformity and self-presentational goals, RQ7 was explicitly concerned with the question why users *like* a Page and why not to find out how impression-motivated this behavior is and how the self-image and the potential audience affect it. The overall consensus among participants of the present study was that one of the main reasons for *liking* a Page (RQ7a) was to tell others something about oneself. This way, *liking* represents a way of communicating information about one's personality and preferences without explicitly stating it, in line with findings obtained by Zhao et al. (2008) that suggest self-presentation on SNS is undergone indirectly by showing instead of telling. At the same time, this finding suggests indeed that self-presentation is a foreground agenda in the process (Krämer & Winter, 2008). This assumption is further supported by the finding, that about half of the participants stated that they would not *like* a Page if no one could see it. Hence, the publicness of the *like*-process is perceived as being central for the process.

Different participants also described that *liking* something represents a means to detect common interests with friends, for example to be able to have someone to talk to about the topic or to see one's own opinion validated. As explicitly stated by one participant, this process is very self-oriented rather than aimed to please the audience (hence, more likely to be associated to the self-presentational goal of self-construction). Shared *like*-behavior can thus be regarded as a means to strengthen one's self-image (that is connected to the respective friend), similar to the process outlined in the context of the goal of positive self-evaluation for conformity (RQ3). Combining conformity and self-presentational goals, *like*-displays might serve as an orientation which content would fulfill the purpose of self-construction based on common interests.

To explicitly address the question to what extent self-presentational goals might disrupt conformity processes, participants were asked what kept them from *liking* the presented Pages. This way, several preconditions for *liking* a Page emerged: concern with the topic, a positive attitude towards the topic, familiarity with the topic and a certain fit of the topic and one's personality. These results support previous findings about authenticity of self-presentation on SNS (chapter 4.6.2.1, e.g. Rosenbaum et al., 2010), also when it comes to *liking* Pages. At the same time they indicate that the main goal for the respective self-presentational strategy is that of self-construction and that self-presentation is undergone in a very strategic way, as suggested for example by findings obtained by Haferkamp and Krämer (2010). In the present study, participants considered for example whether the topic of the Page is relevant enough to tell something about them, hence soft drinks was a product category often perceived as being too trivial to be *liked*.

Although the results so far suggest that one's own preferences determine how one self-presents through *liking*, also other aspects were mentioned. For example, one precondition for *liking* a Page

was that the topic was not controversial, indicating a certain fear about potential negative reactions that lead to self-censorship (see Lampinen et al., 2009). Further observations suggest that participants to some extent show social orientation, as some of them stated only to *like* Pages that friends have *liked* before and they also consider the self-presentational audience (the latter mentioned by about half of the participants, but strongly dependent on the respective topic). For example, one participant thought *liking* the Page of Grey's Anatomy would cause negative social feedback and thus stated not to want to *like* it although she herself was a fan of the show. Considering the last two aspects in combination, they illustrate very fittingly the two sources of social influence suggested in the comprehensive summary: users shown in the *like*-display and users that constitute the self-presentational audience.

Other aspects mentioned were participants only wanting to *like* the official Page of a topic (in line with findings from RQ3 that suggest *like*-displays to indicate which Page is the official one) and one's general *like*-behavior. The latter aspect again suggests that personality characteristics (that have been found to affect expressive and self-presentational behavior on SNS, see chapter 4.6.2.3 and 4.5) might affect *like*-behavior and according conformity reactions. To summarize, findings regarding RQ7 revealed that both motives for self-presentation (self-construction and pleasing the audience) seem to play a role when it comes to *liking*. Further, the findings suggest that self-presentational motives (in terms of self-construction) at first determine whether *liking* a Page comes into question, in which case *like*-displays are taken into account, e.g. because of common interests.

Before summarizing the aforementioned considerations and their implications for the present thesis, several limitations of the present methodology need to be considered: As most everyday interactions are subject to self-presentation (Leary, 1995), self-presentational goals may have played a role with regard to the interview situation. For example, previous studies showed that participants' answers might be affected by the interviewer's attractiveness (Schlenker, 1975 in Mummendey et al., 1995) or his/her noticeable attitude towards the topic (Joseph, Gaes, Tedeschi & Cunningham, 1979 in Mummendey et al., 1995). As Leary and Kowalski (1990) argued, self-presenting as a conformist is generally regarded as unfavorable. The presence of the interviewer as self-presentational audience might thus for example have suppressed some statements in which participants admitted to be influenced by others. However, participants named several aspects associated with conformity and particularly the goal of affiliation, which suggests that the procedure was suitable not to render self-presentational goals salient with regard to the interviewer. As described in the method section, several precautions were taken to distract participants from *like*-displays being the real subject of the study to prevent demand characteristics. In addition, this might also have reduced the fear of being evaluated as a conformist. The second issue that can be regarded as limitation of the interview/think-aloud approach is that participants were asked to explicitly verbalize reasons for

conformity. Several of them at first had difficulties in doing so. That might have led to a more extensive reflection of the issue to be able to answer the question. This way, spontaneous feelings and reactions might have been neglected. Both limitations can be addressed using experimental settings or other methodological approaches. However, as outlined in chapter 3.2.2, also these hold certain challenges, for instance when it comes to inducting (real) friends' reactions in an authentic way. Further, neither the qualitative approach presented here nor an experimental setting would allow for the observation of actual behavior on Facebook. Social network analysis (e.g. conducted by Bond et al., 2012) can shed light on this aspect. However, the psychological processes associated with it can only be fully assessed through experiments or self-report surveys. In sum, the further investigation of conformity and self-presentation with regard to the *like*-feature on Facebook calls for a multi-method approach to cover actual behavior and the underlying psychological processes.

The present study, employing a qualitative approach, is meant to serve as a basis for the next studies by identifying relevant processes and influence factors. The results paint a complex picture about potential underlying motives for conformity reactions towards *like*-displays and situational as well as relational aspects that affect them. For the course of the present thesis one aspect that should be kept in mind is that the suggested goals of yielding to social influence are very qualitative in nature and results also show that they may co-occur (an aspect that was already addressed by Eagly and Chaiken (1993)). To make precise predictions about conformity behavior based on the underlying motives, the respective processes would have to be very clearly distinguishable. The way potential influence mechanisms are suggested by the present findings, isolating single processes based on the underlying goal is not yet possible. Hence, the further strategy is to use the present results to sketch possible influence processes in the course of which predictions about the role of *like*-displays in different situations will be made (rather than making predictions based on the underlying goals) to see and learn whether respective results can be explained by one or several underlying goals. One of the major influence factors observed here was that of ambiguity, as its indicators have been found to be closely associated with self-presentational goals. As a prediction based on the present findings, it is suggested that for unfamiliar topics, *like*-displays may at most be able to cause curiosity and induce a positive/negative attitude. As outlined earlier, these processes may be associated with the desire to make an accurate decision and they may also be based on the goal of cognitive consistency. An attitude induced by *like*-displays needs to be verified further first before it is publicly expressed. Hence, it can be assumed that *like*-displays alone might not lead to a long-term attitude including respective behavior but they might trigger the process by causing curiosity. With regard to familiar topics, *liking* as a public reaction becomes more likely, provided that it is favored and thus fulfills self-presentational goals. Based on the present results, two cases can be derived in which self-presentational goals and

conformity goals are in line with each other: a) When *like*-displays provide information about shared interests with people that the target associates with a positive, self-defining relationship; in that case, the expression of common interests by *liking* a Page may have positive consequences for one's self-concept (conformity goal of positive self-evaluation; self-presentational goal of self-construction) and b) when out of fear of negative reactions a user undertakes self-censorship because of too few *likes* (conformity goal of affiliation, self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience, see also chapter 4.2).

Hence, for *like*-displays to affect *like*-behavior, self-presentational goals have to be fulfilled first, whereas conformity goals and *like*-displays seem to guide the respective behavior. The aforementioned predictions are summarized in Figure 8.

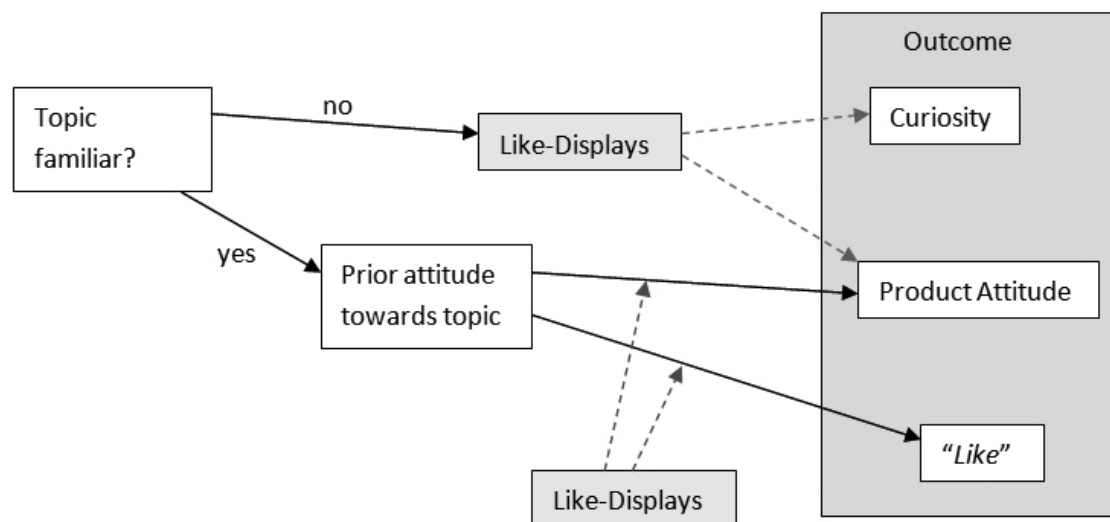


Figure 8. The Role of *Like*-Displays in the Social Influence Process based on Results of Study 1

Based on this theoretical systematization, the following two studies will aim to further investigate these mechanisms while at the same time focusing on the question which characteristics of the *like*-display affect potential conformity reactions, using quantitative methods to create a mixed method approach as suggested earlier. Study 2 will consist of a laboratory experiment that will focus on the impact of number of fans as well as the distinction between fans and friends. Study 3 will then focus on the relationship towards the respective friends, using a correlative approach.

Chapter 7

Study 2: The Impact of Number of Fans and Number of Friends on Conformity Reactions

7.1 Introduction, Hypotheses and Research Questions

As outlined before, the second study aims to explore social influence processes with regard to Facebook Pages in more detail, using an experimental, quantitative approach. In this context, study 2 will focus on number of influencing agents as influence factor as well as the kind of source as influence factor (in terms of fans or friends), as suggested in guiding research question 2 (GRQ2). Secondly, a first step will be taken in exploring which self-presentational goals can be observed when it comes to *liking* a Page and how these might interact with conformity goals (GRQ3). In the discussion section, the findings of the present study will be interpreted against potential motives for social influence (GRQ1) in the discussion section.

Number of fans as influence factor has been suggested to have an generally positive impact on conformity effects (independent of the respective motive, when no relational aspects are taken into account; e.g. Asch, 1955; Insko et al., 1985; Lee & Nass, 2002), although the exact form of that relationship (e.g. linear or curvilinear) is still subject to scientific debate (see chapter 3.3.3.4). Based on this, it is noticeable that a lot of studies on conformity online focus on the number of influencing agents to determine social influence in the first place, for example in the form of statistical ratings (Edwards et al., 2007; Walther et al., 2012) or *likes* (Bak & Keßler, 2012; Egebark & Ekström, 2011). Other aspects that have been varied to determine social influence for example comprise valence of

the evaluation (Walther et al., 2010). As a *like* always represents a positive evaluation (see chapter 2.2.4) and thus valence cannot vary, it seems reasonable to focus on number of influencing agents as the key aspect to determine whether social influence takes place on Facebook Pages. This will fill the gap in research that is concerned with the impact of number of *likes* on Facebook Pages. In detail, number of influencing agents may affect a variety of potential outcomes, public as well as private ones, depending on the underlying conformity goals (see chapter 3.3.1). Results of study 1 illustrate that a lot of potential motives have to be taken into account, particularly when public reactions are considered (see chapter 6.4).

For the present purpose, attitude will be considered as a private reaction (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Furthermore, based on results of study 1 that illustrate the relevance of *like*-displays when gaining a first impression of an unknown topic, curiosity will be included as well when it comes to private reactions. As a public reaction, *liking* the Page will be considered. Based on these remarks, the following hypotheses will be investigated:

H1a: Attitude about the topic is more in line with the campaign message when the number of fans increases.

H1b: Curiosity about the topic is stronger when the number of fans increases.

H1c: *Like*-intention regarding the campaign Page is stronger when the number of fans increases.

And parallel hypotheses will be investigated for number of friends:

H2a: Attitude about the topic is more in line with the campaign message when the number of friends displayed as fans increases.

H2b: Curiosity about the topic is stronger when the number of friends displayed as fans increases.

H2c: *Like*-intention regarding the campaign Page is stronger when the number of friends displayed as fans increases.

Although number of influencing agents has often been considered as an important impact factor for conformity (see last paragraph), empirical results (e.g. Egebark & Ekström, 2011) suggest that it might interact with relational aspects. Relational aspects that will be considered in study 2 refer to the kind of source that is displayed in terms of unknown fans or friends of the user (without yet considering different nuances in participants' relationship towards friends). Previous empirical work suggests that strong ties are more influential than weak ties, e.g. when it comes to public behavior

online (e.g. Bond et al., 2012; Egebark & Ekström, 2011; Hagen & Hofmann, 2013; Muchnik et al., 2013). Based on these results, friends should have greater impact on the presented dependent variables than unknown fans. However, the respective conformity goals have to be taken into account here. For example, results of study 1 suggest that fan-displays seem to be more important for gaining a first impression of the Page, while friend-displays are more likely to be associated with *like*-behavior, being indicative of norms. Based on these considerations, the exact pattern of potential interaction effects between fans and friends cannot reliably be predicted. Therefore, the following research questions will be tested:

RQ1a: Are there interaction effects between number of friends and number of fans regarding attitude?

RQ1b: Are there interaction effects between number of friends and number of fans regarding curiosity?

RQ1c: Are there interaction effects between number of friends and number of fans regarding *like*-intention?

As outlined in the comprehensive summary, empirical results in the context of social network sites indicate that salient self-presentational goals may interfere with conformity goals (chapter 5), provided that *liking* a Page represents a means of self-presentation. Therefore, the salience of respective goals needs to be taken into account when investigating *liking* as a public conformity reaction. This will be undertaken in the present study in three ways: by exploring the relationship between influencing agents and the self-presentational audience, by exploring personal characteristics that have been found to be associated with conformity as a self-presentational strategy as well as by investigating how self-presentational strategies on Facebook in particular are associated with *like*-intention in the present context.

In contrast to classical conformity studies, the self-presentational audience and the group of influencing agents do not overlap completely in the Facebook environment, as the self-presentational audience is largely undetermined (e.g. Krämer & Winter, 2008). As a consequence, users might undertake strategic self-censorship when it comes to self-presentation on SNS (see Lampinen et al., 2009), based on how they expect their audience to be composed. To explore the relation between these two social forces eliciting social influence (see comprehensive summary, chapter 5), it has to be investigated to what extent *like*-displays (the influencing agent from a conformity perspective) affect the perception of the self-presentational audience in terms of self-presentational goals. For example, if a large number of fans or friends is presented on the Page, people who support the respective topic may become salient as perceived or imagined self-presentational audience. And as a second step,

this perceived self-presentational audience and its preferences may or may not have an effect on *liking* as a conformity reaction, depending of whether the conformity goal of affiliation is salient in combination with the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience (chapter 4.4). Based on these considerations, the following research questions are stated:

RQ2a: Do fan-displays affect the expectation of positive reactions from the self-presentational audience?

RQ2b: Does the expectation of positive reactions from the self-presentational audience mediate the effects of fan-displays on *like*-intention?

RQ3a: Do friend-displays affect the expectation of positive reactions from the self-presentational audience?

RQ3b: Does the expectation of positive reactions from the self-presentational audience mediate the effects of friend-displays on *like*-intention?

In chapter 4.5.1, public self-consciousness was introduced as a state variable that describes a person's tendency to be concerned with impressions others gain of him/her (Leary, 1995). Accordingly, people with high public self-consciousness are more concerned with their appearance or the way they present themselves out of fear for social rejection (Fenigstein, 1975 in Leary, 1995). Previous studies have found public self-consciousness was associated with stronger conformity behavior (Froming & Carver, 1981 in Leary, 1995) and a generally high audience-orientation (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990 in Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). In accordance with that, Hafekamp (2010) found participants with a high public self-consciousness to be more susceptible to social comparison information on SNS. Although not explicitly investigated in previous research, it seems reasonable to assume that this effect of public self-consciousness should be most noticeable when conformity is based on affiliation goals (as discussed in the comprehensive summary, see chapter 5). Accordingly, this might apply to *liking* a Facebook Page as well, provided the process is based on affiliation goals. As a consequence, the following hypotheses are stated:

H3: A person's tendency towards public self-consciousness increases the effect of number of fans on *like*-intention.

H4: A person's tendency towards public self-consciousness increases the effect of number of friends on *like*-intention.

The third aspect that will be explored in the context of how self-presentational goals might affect conformity behavior is the question to what extent self-presentational strategies affect *like*-intention in the given context. Results of study 1 have shown that self-presentation in the form of self-construction

plays an important role for *like*-behavior; however, there was also anecdotal evidence of participants who reported to be concerned with the self-presentational audience. As outlined in chapter 4.6.2.1, self-presentational strategies on SNS have been found to be quite authentic (e.g. Lampe et al., 2010). However, the large and undetermined audience might prevent certain self-presentational tactics because users undertake self-censorship (e.g. Lampinen et al., 2009). In the context of investigating public conformity on Facebook, the prevalence of these self-presentational goals (as respective potential influence factors) has to be considered. Based on these considerations, the following final research questions are stated:

RQ4: Which self-presentational strategies on Facebook predict *like*-intention?

RQ5: Which goals for conformity or self-presentation are mentioned as reasons (not) to *like* the presented Pages?

7.2 Method

7.2.1 Sample and Procedure

To address the aforementioned hypotheses and research questions, an online experiment (IRB-approved) was set up and run over a period of six months between September 2012 and February 2013. Recruiting participants was mainly undertaken online (via social media, message boards or email) and partly on campus. Participants did not receive financial compensation for their participation. Between September 2012 and November 2013, 170 participants were recruited in the course of two bachelor theses (Bloch, 2012; Soysal, 2013), 29 of which were removed from the final sample for the present study as they were under the age of 18. Between December and February 2013, another 95 participants were recruited for the study, resulting in a final sample of 236. An a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) suggested a sufficient sample size, assuming a medium effect size, for the planned analyses of variance as well as regression analyses.

The final sample consisted of 102 men (43.2%) and 134 women (56.8%) between the age of 18 and 60 ($M = 27.83$; $SD = 7.64$). Most of them were college students ($n = 131$, 55.5%) or normal employees ($n = 74$, 31.4%). 10 participants (4.2%) were freelancers, 9 (3.8%) were doing an apprenticeship, 6 (2.5%) were unemployed and 6 (2.5%) were pupils. All participants were Facebook users and had been members of the SNS between 0.40 and 8 years ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.41$). They reported to have between 8 and 1300 Facebook friends ($M = 207.98$, $SD = 168.76$) and had spent an average of 2.51

Table 5: Experimental Design of Study 2

| | Few fans (1,718) | Many fans (497k) | No fans |
|------------|------------------|------------------|----------|
| 1 friend | $n = 49$ | $n = 46$ | - |
| 5 friends | $n = 46$ | $n = 50$ | - |
| No friends | - | - | $n = 45$ |

($SD = 3.627$) hours on Facebook each day during the previous week. Participants further reported to have *liked* between 0 and 350 Pages ($M = 41.13$, $SD = 56.10$).

After calling up the questionnaire, participants were welcomed and vaguely informed about the purpose of the study ("evaluation of Facebook Pages"). After giving consent, they were led to the pre-questionnaire, assessing involvement and familiarity with the respective topic (that the Page was concerned with) as well as their general Facebook use. On the next page, the stimulus material was presented and participants were asked to thoroughly examine the Page's content, imagining they had come across it while browsing Facebook. After that, all dependent variables were assessed (see measures section). The next pages of the questionnaire contained manipulation check items as well as scales for measuring public self-consciousness and self-presentation on Facebook. Finally, demographic aspects were assessed. Before closing the questionnaire, participants received a debriefing about the real purpose of the study, explaining the experimental manipulations. Overall, the procedure took between 10 and 15 minutes.

7.2.2 Experimental Design

In the experiment, number of fans as well as number of friends on a Facebook Page were varied, resulting in a 2x2-factorial between-subjects design plus a control condition (without any fans or friends), see Table 5. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions via the system.

7.2.3 Stimulus Material

Based on the results of the interview study it was decided not to use products such as television shows or drinks for the purpose of finding Pages that to a certain extent fulfill self-presentational goals. Regarding drinks it was mentioned several times during the interviews of study 1 that the product type was too trivial to qualify as a means of self-presentation (see results section of study 1, RQ7b).

Regarding television shows, the interview results illustrated that opinions may vary substantially and it further should be ensured that no particular age group or gender was targeted by the topic. Hence it was decided for study 2, to use Facebook Pages that feature a (social) campaign for which the average public opinion was a favorable one so that it might appeal to self-presentational goals (in line with results of study 1).

For purposes of generalization, two campaigns were used which were generally favored, based on a pretest. Overall, nine (German) campaign topics were pretested that were present on Facebook at the time of the study (see Table 6). The topic and the title of the respective Facebook campaigns were shown to 24 participants, who were asked whether the campaign title reflected their own opinion about the topic (1 = not at all, 5 = very much; option for "I'm not familiar with the topic or don't have an opinion about it").

Two topics were extracted that were about equally favored, namely topic 1 (nuclear energy, NE) and topic 7 (Kony, KO)¹. Both topics were found to be in line with participants' opinion when compared to the scale mean of 2.5 ($t_{NE}(23) = 6.094, p < .001$; $t_{KO}(11) = 6.159, p < .001$).

Based on previous studies using a similar methodology (e.g. Bak & Keßler, 2012; Edwards et al., 2007; Knoll, 2013), mock up Facebook Pages were used as stimulus material, using a screenshot of the upper part of the Page (including the header, profile picture, Page tabs and number of *likes*). Figure 9 displays a mock-up of the original material to illustrate the set-up (in the original stimulus material, the Page screenshot included the Facebook logo and interaction buttons, making it look like an actual screenshot from a Facebook Page). No postings were displayed on that excerpt to avoid introducing confounding information. For both topics, screenshots of actual campaign Pages were used as reference that both used a similar imagery. All confounding information, such as the description as well as the thumbnails and titles of the tabs were adapted so that they showed the same information for both Pages (a call to action in the description section and tabs for photos, *like*-displays and inviting friends). Based on comments made by participants of the pretest, a note was added to the Kony Page saying that the Page is not associated with Invisible Children (the organization that was subject of controversial debate at that time for producing a viral video for the campaign; see Bailyn, 2012). The number of fans was varied using fan numbers of German Facebook campaigns

¹ Joseph Kony is the leader of a rebel militia that originated in Uganda (Lord's Resistance Army, LRA), infamous for murder, abduction and other human rights violations. Since his warrant for arrest in 2005, Joseph Kony and the LRA movement have left Uganda and moved to neighbor countries. In 2012, Joseph Kony became the subject of a video gone viral on social media that aimed to draw attention to the crimes Kony is condemned for as well as the fact that he had not been arrested until this point. While gaining a lot of positive feedback, the video and its producers (the organization Invisible Children, Inc.) were also harshly criticized for different reasons, e.g. for misstating facts within the video. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014)

Table 6: Pretest Results for Study 2: To what extent does the Campaign reflect Participants' own Opinion?

| Topic | Campaign Title | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> |
|---|--|----------|-----------|----------|
| Nuclear Energy | "Nuclear Energy? No, thanks!" | 3.92 | 1.13 | 24 |
| Honorarium for Ex President Wulff | "Honorarium for Wulff? Are you crazy?" | 3.79 | 1.35 | 24 |
| Non-Smoking Law | "Against non-smoking bars!" | 1.83 | 1.23 | 23 |
| Genetically Manipulated Food | "No Genfood." | 3.59 | 1.33 | 22 |
| The Monks' Protests in Burma | "Support the Monks' Protests in Burma!" | 3.75 | 1.25 | 4 |
| Anti Piracy Agreement (ACTA) | "United against ACTA!!!" | 3.87 | 0.83 | 15 |
| The leader of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Joseph Kony | "Stop Joseph Kony" | 4.17 | 0.93 | 12 |
| Arabic Spring in Syria | "Adopt a Revolution: Support the Syrian spring!" | 4.00 | 0.84 | 15 |
| The Anonymous Movement | "Support 'Anonymous'!" | 3.23 | 0.92 | 13 |

as reference, resulting in a large number of 497,000 fans and a low number of 1,718 fans. Both campaign titles shown were German, illustrating that the Pages were national and not international ones (because based on some remarks by participants of study 1, the number of fans might otherwise suggest how regionally distributed the campaign is). For the manipulation of number of friends, 1 person was used as a low number and 5 people were used as a high number. The red frames in Figure 9 mark the placements of the information about number of fans and number of friends. Due to the nature of the stimulus material consisting of screenshots, participants just saw the number of friends who had *liked* the Page and no further information about the respective people. In the control conditions, the numbers of fans and friends were removed entirely by cropping the lower part of the screenshot and by removing one of the tabs.



Figure 9. Set-Up of the Stimulus Pages used in Study 2

7.2.4 Measures

7.2.4.1 Dependent Variables

Subsequent attitude was assessed using one single item from the pretest, namely the perception to what extent the Page's statement *reflected one's own opinion* (measured on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree").

To assess **curiosity**, two self-constructed items were used (each measured on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"): *I intend to gather further information about the topic* and *I intend to have a closer look at the Page*. For further analysis, the scale mean was calculated, revealing a satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .855$).

Regarding the **liking of the Page**, one self-constructed item was used, asking participants *how likely they were to like the Page*, measured via a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "fully disagree" to 7 = "fully agree".

To measure to what extent **liking the Page would fulfill the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience**, one item was added to the questionnaire, based on results of study 1, assessed on a seven point Likert scale (from 1 = "fully disagree" to 7 = "fully agree"). It asked participants to what extent they felt they would *get positive feedback from their peers if they liked the Page*.

Furthermore, an open-ended question was added to the questionnaire which asked participants to describe **why or why not they would like the respective Page**. Overall, 229 participants answered the open-ended question. Answers were categorized, using a mainly inductive approach, but drawing on results of study 1. 10% of the material was cross-coded by a second person, resulting in a high inter rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = .925$).

7.2.4.2 Moderating Variables and Predictors

Public self-consciousness was assessed using the German version (Heinemann, 1979) of the scale developed by Fenigstein et al. (1975). Seven items were rated on a five point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"), e.g. *I often think about how I behave in public*. For further analysis, the scale mean was constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .765$).

Facebook self-presentation in the context of the present thesis refers to the way a user strategically creates his/her profile and shapes public behavior on Facebook. A 13-item scale was created, using a scale proposed by Gogolinski (2010) on Facebook profile creation as a reference, which covered aspects such as how authentic self-presentation on Facebook is and how concerned people are with self-presentation on Facebook in general (rated on a five point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). For the present purpose, Gogolinski's scale was adapted by adding several items that explicitly referred to the use of the *like*-feature for self-presentation. An exploratory factor analysis (using principal axis analysis with promax rotation based on Horn, 1965) revealed four factors for self-presentation on Facebook (see table 7), namely *strategic self-censorship based on self-construction* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .726$), *audience-orientation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .706$), *authenticity*

(Cronbach's $\alpha = .701$) and *variety of self-presentation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .549$). Because of the unsatisfactory reliability, variety of self-presentation was excluded from further analysis.

7.2.4.3 Control Variables and Demographic Measures

Based on theoretical considerations (e.g. chapter 3.3.3.3) and results of study 1, three aspects were considered to represent important control variables: involvement with the topic, familiarity with the topic and intensity of Facebook use.

Involvement with the campaign topic was assessed using seven items from the Revised Product Involvement Inventory (RPII, McQuarrie & Munson, 1987), measured on a seven point bipolar scale. Example items are *important/unimportant*, *of no concern/of concern to me*. For further analysis, the scale mean was constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .902$).

Familiarity with the topic was measured using three self-constructed items, asking participants *whether they have concerned themselves with the topic in detail*, *whether they know a lot about the topic* and *whether they are uninformed about it* (reversed item). All items were rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". For further analysis, the mean of all the items was calculated (Cronbach's $\alpha = .812$).

To measure **Facebook intensity**, six items of the Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison et al., 2007) were used (e.g. *Facebook is part of my everyday activity* and *Facebook has become part of my daily routine*), rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". The scale mean used for further analysis showed satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .844$).

For the purpose of describing the sample, participants' **general like-behavior** was assessed by asking them *how many Pages they had liked in the past* (open-ended question). Furthermore, they were asked *how much time they had spent on Facebook the previous week* and *how many Facebook friends they had*. Demographic measures included *age*, *gender* and *current occupational status*.

7.2.4.4 Manipulation Check

To ensure the manipulation of the number of fans and friends shown on the Facebook Page was successful, two manipulation check items were added to the questionnaire (one for each kind of *like-display*): *What was your perception of the number of fans/friends?* (measured on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "there were very few of them" to 7 = "there were quite a lot of them").

Table 7: Pattern Matrix for Principal Axis Analysis

| | Factor | | | |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | (.726) | (.706) | (.701) | (.549) |
| I would not <i>like</i> a Page if I'm not entirely positive about its content. | .812 | | | |
| I limit the amount of information I display on my Facebook profile. | .679 | | | |
| I would not <i>like</i> a Page if I'm not familiar with the content. | .532 | | | |
| I choose the information I display on my profile based on who I know will be viewing it. | | .642 | | |
| I'm very concerned with who views my Facebook profile. | | .627 | | |
| I weigh the advantages and disadvantages of displaying certain information on my profile. | | .509 | | |
| When I post something on my Facebook profile, I don't care what others might think about it. | | -.486 | | |
| I tend to focus more on presenting my positive qualities on my profile than my negative qualities. | | .403 | | |
| I am concerned with presenting myself honestly on my Facebook profile. | | | .883 | |
| I am concerned with presenting myself accurately on my Facebook profile. | | | .632 | |
| I display opinionated information I know might be controversial. | | | | .602 |
| I will post any information on my Facebook profile. | | | | .553 |
| My profile reflects all aspects of who I am. | | | | .470 |

Factor Loadings below .4 are suppressed

Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations for Manipulation Check Number of Fans

| Number of Fans | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> |
|----------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| No fans | 3.42 | 1.98 | 30 |
| Few fans | 3.39 | 1.80 | 81 |
| Many fans | 4.38 | 2.08 | 85 |

Table 9: Means and Standard Deviations for Manipulation Check Number of Friends

| Number of Friends | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| No friends | 2.45 | 1.32 | 30 |
| Few friends | 2.37 | 1.62 | 82 |
| Many friends | 3.15 | 1.60 | 78 |

Results of a one-factorial ANOVA, using the *perceived number of fans* as dependent variable and the recoded condition variable *many fans/few fans/no fans* as independent factor, suggest a significant between group effect ($F(2,193) = 6.023$, $p = .003$, $\eta p^2 = .059$). According to Cohen (1988), this describes a medium-sized effect. Post hoc tests (Bonferroni) however illustrate that the pattern is not quite as expected: Only the difference between the few fans and the many fans condition turned out to be significant ($SE = .304$, $p = .004$), while no differences between the control condition and the two experimental conditions were found (means and standard deviations see table 8).

The same procedure was undertaken to test the successful manipulation of the number of friends. Results of the one-factorial ANOVA showed a significant between group effect ($F(2,187) = 5.361$, $p = .005$, $\eta p^2 = .054$), a small to medium-sized effect (Cohen, 1988). However, looking at the post hoc tests (Bonferroni), a similar pattern emerged as before: Only the few friends and many friends conditions differed significantly ($SE = .249$, $p = .006$), while no differences between the control condition and the two experimental conditions were found (means and standard deviations are shown in table 9).

Overall, the manipulation check suggests that the manipulation of number of fans and friends was successful in the experimental conditions but that participants' perception was not clear regarding the control condition. For that reason it was decided to exclude the control condition from further analyses.

Table 10: Means and Standard Deviations Familiarity and Involvement of both Campaign Topics

| Topic | Familiarity | | | Involvement | | |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> |
| Nuclear Energy | 4.29 | 1.37 | 120 | 5.05 | 1.19 | 120 |
| Kony | 2.87 | 1.59 | 116 | 4.02 | 1.26 | 116 |

7.3 Results

7.3.1 Preliminary Analyses

Results of a preliminary two-factorial MANOVA (in which number of fans and number of friends - excluding control condition - were used as independent factors) suggest that participants in the different conditions did not differ regarding their *involvement* and *familiarity* with the topics, the *intensity of their Facebook use*, *general like-behavior*, *Facebook self-presentation* and *public self-consciousness*.

Another one-factorial MANOVA was conducted to test how the different campaign topics were perceived (using the two topics as independent factor). Results suggest that the topic of *nuclear energy* was more familiar ($F(1,234) = 42.165, p < .001, \eta p^2 = .19$) and more involving ($F(1,234) = 53.931, p < .001, \eta p^2 = .15$) than the topic of *Joseph Kony* (means and standard deviations see table 10).

7.3.2 Effects of Fans and Friends (H1, H2, RQ1)

H1a-c, H2a-c and RQ1a-c were tested by conducting a two-factorial MANCOVA with the following settings: *number of fans* and *number of friends* (excluding control condition) were entered as independent factors, *attitude*, *curiosity* and *like-intention* were used as dependent variables and the control variables *familiarity* with the topic, *involvement* with the topic and *Facebook intensity* were included as covariates. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for all dependent variables.

Regarding H1a-c, the analysis of variance did not reveal a main effect of *number of fans* on any of the tested dependent variables. Consequently, H1a-c have to be rejected.

Table 11: Means and Standard Deviations for Interaction Effect of Number of Fans and Friends on Attitude

| | Few Fans | | | Many Fans | | |
|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> |
| One Friend | 2.99 | 2.13 | 42 | 3.24 | 2.16 | 41 |
| Five Friends | 3.99 | 1.97 | 39 | 3.61 | 2.03 | 45 |

In the context of H2, a main effect for *number of friends* on *attitude* was found (H2b, $F(1,160) = 6.392$, $p = .012$, $\eta p^2 = .038$), indicating that the campaign was perceived as being more in line with one's own attitude when five friends were shown ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 2.00$, $n = 84$) in contrast to one friend ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 2.14$, $n = 83$). No main effect of *number of friends* was observed for *like-intention* or *curiosity*, reflected in the non-significant multivariate test score. Based on these results, H2b is supported while H2a as well as H2c have to be rejected.

To answer RQ1a-c, potential interaction effects of both factors were taken into account. Results show an interaction effect on *attitude* (RQ1b, $F(1,160) = 4.765$, $p = .030$, $\eta p^2 = .029$) with *number of friends* showing a stronger impact on attitude when *number of fans* was low (means and standard deviations see table 11). In detail, the combination of few fans and many friends was rated highest ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.97$, $n = 39$), while the combination of few fans and few friends was rated lowest ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 2.13$, $n = 42$). In the condition with many fans, the difference between few and many friends was not as strong (see also Figure 10). No further interaction effects on other dependent variables were found (RQ1a and RQ1c).

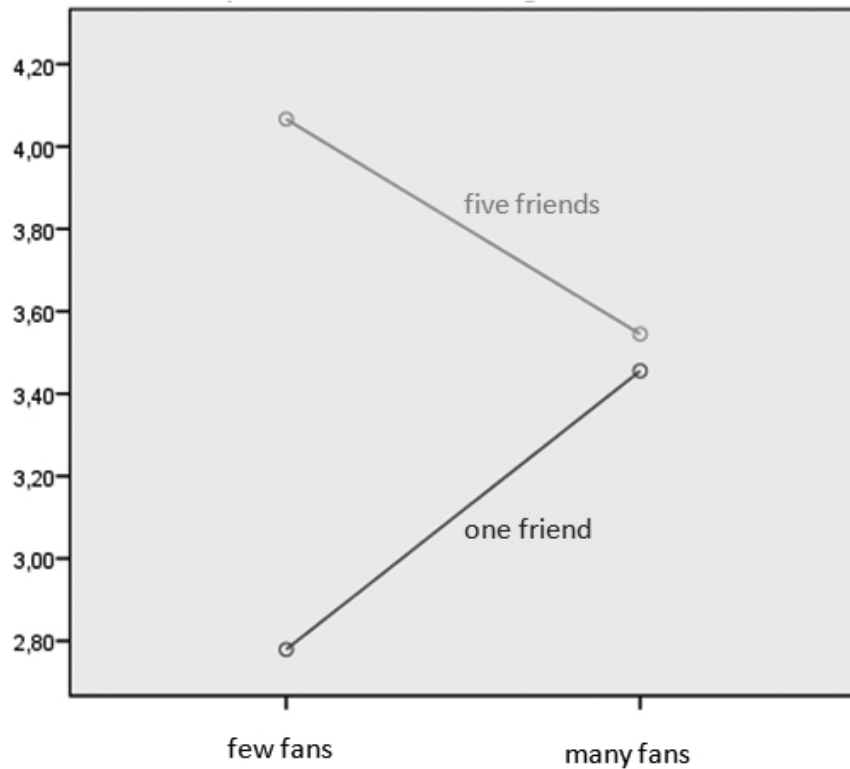


Figure 10. Plot of the Interaction Effect of Number of Fans and Friends on Attitude

As not all subhypotheses were supported until this point, H1a-c, H2a-c and RQ1a-c were furthermore tested separately for both campaigns used as stimulus in an exploratory approach. The aforementioned two-factorial MANCOVA was conducted as reported before, but first only for those participants who had rated the campaign on nuclear energy. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for all dependent variables. No significant main effect for *number of fans* (H1a-c), no main effects for *number of friends* (H2a-c) and no interaction effects between both factors (RQ1a-c) could be observed.

The two-factorial MANCOVA was repeated again as reported before, this time for participants who had been asked to rate the Kony campaign Page. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for all dependent variables. Results for the Kony campaign show no significant main effect for *number of fans* (H1a-c). For *number of friends*, a significant main effect emerged on *attitude* (H2b, $F(1,72) = 5.164$, $p = .026$, $\eta p^2 = .067$) suggesting that the campaign was more strongly in line with participants' opinion when five friends were shown ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 2.08$) in contrast to when only one friend was shown ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.82$). No main effects of *number of friends* were observed for the other dependent variables (non-significant multivariate tests). As a consequence, H2b is supported

for the Kony campaign while H2a and H2c have to be rejected. With regard to RQ1a-c, no interaction effect could be observed for the Kony campaign.

To summarize, no main effects for *number of fans* were found, neither for the whole nor for any of the subsamples. Hence, H1a-c have to be rejected. With regard to *number of friends*, however, several single effects were found: For the whole sample, number of friends had an effect on attitude (H2b), its form being dependent on the *number of fans* (RQ1b). The same main effect was observed for those participants who had seen the Kony Page (H2b).

7.3.3 Self-Presentational Audience (RQ2 + RQ3)

To test whether number of fans and friends affected the perception of the self-presentational audience and the preferences of its members (RQ2 + RQ3), another two-factorial ANCOVA was conducted. Again, *number of fans and friends* were used as independent factors and *involvement*, *familiarity* and *Facebook intensity* were entered as covariates. The expectation to be rewarded with *positive reactions from one's peers* when *liking* the Page served as dependent variable. Results show a main effect of *number of fans* (RQ2a, $F(1,143) = 4.906$, $p = .028$, $\eta p^2 = .033$): *positive rewards* were more likely to be expected when the number of fans was high ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 2.03$) in contrast to when few fans were shown ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.82$). No main effect regarding *number of friends* (RQ3a), nor any interaction effects emerged.

Repeating the two-factorial ANCOVA for both subsamples, the same effect for *number of fans* as before (RQ2a) emerged for those participants who had been confronted with the *nuclear energy* campaign ($F(1,69) = 4.860$, $p = .031$, $\eta p^2 = .066$): the feeling of being able to *gain positive reactions* when *liking* the Page was stronger when many fans were shown ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.93$) in contrast to when few fans were shown ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.94$). No main effects for *number of friends* (RQ3a), nor any interaction effects were observed. The analysis was repeated again for the subsample of participants who had been confronted with the *Kony* campaign. This time, no main or interaction effects could be observed (RQ2a and RQ3a).

For the testing of RQ2b and RQ3b, mediation analyses were conducted, employing a bootstrapping procedure (5000 bootstrap resamples) suggested by Hayes (2009). The INDIRECT macro for SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2008)² was used for this purpose. To test RQ2b, *number of fans* was used as independent variable, *like-intention* was used as dependent variable and the perception to be *rewarded with positive reactions* from peers when *liking* the Page was employed as mediator.

²The macro can be downloaded here: <http://www.afhayes.com/spss-sas-and-mplus-macros-and-code.html>

Furthermore, *involvement*, *familiarity* and *Facebook intensity* were added as control variables. All scores were z-standardized.

For the entire sample, the analysis revealed a full mediation of *number of fans* on *like-intention* (RQ2b) through the *expectations of positive reactions* from one's peers with a non-significant c'-path and an indirect effect estimate of .054 (*CI lower* = .006; *CI upper* = .121). Furthermore, mediator and dependent variable were positively related ($\beta = .324$, $SE = .077$, $p < .001$). No such effect was found when employing *number of friends* as independent variable, suggesting that no mediation effect exists here.

When repeating the procedure for the different subsamples, a similar pattern emerged for those participants who had seen the *nuclear energy* campaign: the effect of *number of fans* on *like-intention* appears to be fully mediated by the *expectation of positive reactions*, showing an indirect effect estimate of .098 (*CI lower* = .060; *CI upper* = .233) and a non-significant c'-path. Again, mediator and dependent variable showed a positive relation ($\beta = .358$, $SE = .113$, $p = .002$). No effects were found for *number of friends*. For the *Kony* subsample, no mediation effects were observed at all.

7.3.4 Effects of Public Self-Consciousness on Conformity Behavior (H3 + H4)

To test H3, concerned with the assumption that conformity effects are dependent on a person's tendency towards public self-consciousness, a moderated linear regression analyses was conducted for *like-intention* as dependent variable. In detail, the first step of the regression analysis comprised z-standardized scores of *Facebook intensity*, *familiarity* and *involvement* with the topic as control variables. The predictor *number of fans* was dummy-coded and entered into the second step, while the third step included the z-standardized score of *public self-consciousness* as moderator. The final step comprised the interaction term of predictor and moderator. Results showed no significant change in R^2 for the interaction term; hence, the assumption of an interaction effect - and thus H3 - has to be rejected.

A similar procedure was used to test H4, this time using the dummy-coded variable for *number of friends* as predictor. Again, *Facebook intensity*, *familiarity* and *involvement* were entered into the first step as control variables and the final step comprised the interaction term of predictor (*number of friends*) and moderator (*public self-consciousness*). Results showed no significant change in R^2 for the last step. Hence, no interaction effect was observed (H4 has to be rejected).

Table 12: Regression Analysis for *Like-Intention* (RQ4)

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | F | β | $SE B$ |
|---------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Model 1 | .025 | .025* | 6.026 | | |
| Authenticity | | | | .158* | .132 |
| Model 2 | .048 | .022* | 5.488 | | |
| Authenticity | | | | .214** | .139 |
| Strategic Self-Censorship | | | | -.160* | .138 |
| Model 3 | .048 | .000 | .117 | | |
| Authenticity | | | | .153** | .150 |
| Strategic Self-Censorship | | | | -.026* | .145 |
| Audience Orientation | | | | -.026 | .158 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$

Both procedures were repeated for the two campaigns separately, but no effects were observed. Consequently, no support was found for H3 and H4, neither in the whole sample nor in any of the subsamples.

7.3.5 Self-Presentation on Facebook and *Liking* (RQ4)

To answer RQ4, a linear hierarchical regression analysis was conducted (method enter), using *like-intention* as criterium variable and all three factors for self-presentational strategies on Facebook as predictors in different, subsequent steps: the factor *authenticity* was entered in the first step because there exists empirical evidence from several studies suggesting that authenticity is an important part of SNS self-presentation (e.g. Haferkamp & Krämer, 2010; Lampe et al., 2006, Toma & Carlson, 2012). As a second step, *strategic self-censorship* was entered. Empirical results so far suggest that this aspect might be an important strategy to handle multiple audiences on SNS (e.g. Lampinen et al., 2009). Furthermore, this aspect was also mentioned of participants in study 1 (chapter 6.4). The final step comprised the factor *audience orientation*. Theoretical conceptualizations (e.g. Krämer & Winter, 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011) suggest that the audience on SNS is rather undetermined, thus often imagined. Because of that, it is suggested that *audience orientation* is difficult and thus least likely to predict *like-intention*. Results of the regression analysis indicate that the first step (authenticity, $\Delta R^2 = .025$, $p = .015$) and the second step (strategic self-presentation, $\Delta R^2 = .022$, $p = .020$) significantly added to the explained variance (a medium to large effect size, see Cohen, 1988), with *authenticity* being positively and *self-censorship* being negatively related to the criterium variable *like-intention*.

7.3.6 Open-ended Question: Influence Factors for *Like*-Intention (RQ5)

The categorization of participants' answers regarding the open-ended question why they would (not) *like* the presented Page revealed four influence factors. The one mentioned most often ($N = 88$) was *self-construction*: Participants described to be willing to *like* the presented Page because the campaign was in line with their own attitude or because they were concerned with it.

"Because I'm against nuclear energy!"

Similarly, they described to do be willing to *like* the Page because they did not agree with its content or were not interested in the topic.

"The subject is not relevant enough to me personally to be worth a like"

Secondly, a lot of participants ($N = 82$) also mentioned the *design and content of the Page* as a reason, mostly not to *like* the presented Page, e.g. because they requested more information about the campaign or they were skeptical regarding the Page's respectability because of the scarcity of information.

"Not enough information about the provider of that Page :("

"As this is a controversial topic, I would expect a controversial Facebook presence!"

Apart from that, the header image is a poor choice"

About a sixth of all participants ($N = 38$) further described not to be willing to *like* the Page because they undergo *self-censorship* regarding political topics or the *like*-feature in general.

"I do not share my political views via Facebook"

About the same number of participants ($N = 37$) mentioned the *support of that particular campaign* as a reason to *like* a Page or to not *like* a Page. Here, answers differed a little, depending on the campaign: While for *nuclear energy*, about half of the participants shared the opinion that *liking* the Page may help the respective campaign (the fight against *nuclear energy* or the support of the *Kony* campaign, respectively), the other half agreed that *liking* something on Facebook did not make a difference for the success of the campaign. With regard to the *Kony* campaign, several participants described how controversial the issue was perceived to be and that they were skeptical regarding the integrity of the campaign in this context.

"This whole Kony thing is bullshit, just like the video. This campaign is pure propaganda.

The guy who created the video was arrested for public masturbation. How can I take such a pervert serious? So this is not about the Page, but about the topic in general."

As an answer to RQ5, it can be stated that self-construction goals in the context of self-presentation seem to play a major role for participants. Furthermore, a tendency towards self-censorship regarding political topics could be observed. Other reasons not directly associated with self-presentation concerned the Page's appearance and the campaign it represented.

7.4 Discussion

The present study aimed to experimentally investigate the assumption that *like*-displays on Facebook Pages elicit conformity and explore the role of self-presentational goals and strategies in that process. The overall picture shows that number of friends as well as number of fans seemed to have elicited conformity reactions, although not as consistent as expected. The same applies to RQ1, concerned with potential interaction effects. However, several subhypotheses were confirmed and will be discussed first before reviewing explanations for the unsupported hypotheses.

In the context of H2b, the number of friends (partly interacting with the number of fans) shown on the Facebook Page was found to positively affect how likely participants were to perceive the campaign as being in line with their own opinion about the topic. Looking at the affected dependent variable, the conformity reaction observed was a private one, assessing to what extent participants agreed with the message of the campaign. Neither for curiosity nor for *like*-intention, such an effect was observed. The finding that private attitude was affected but not public behavior would suggest the outcome to be private acceptance (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Turner, 1991), because it cannot have been caused by affiliation goals (the respective audience will not learn of the attitude). According to Kiesler and Kiesler (1970), private acceptance may be accompanied by according behavior, but it does not have to be the case. Here, for example, it might be assumed that expressing the respective attitude publicly might be affected by self-presentational concerns, something that will be discussed later in the context of RQ2 to RQ5. However, based on previous conceptualizations of private acceptance, this kind of influence might lead to a genuine attitude change and respective behavior on a long-term basis (e.g. Turner, 1991). While based on the present results no statement can be made regarding the persistence of the emerging attitude, the assumption of private acceptance suggests that the goal of accuracy or the goal of positive self-presentation might play a role here. When looking at the independent variables that the aforementioned effects were concerned with, it can be noted that the main effect for number of friends coincides with the general assumption of a higher number of influencing agents strengthening conformity (e.g. Insko et al., 1985). It was furthermore observed that the impact of the number of friends on participants' perceptions of their own opinions were dependent on how many fans were shown on the Facebook Page (RQ1b): When the number of fans

was high, means for the two friend conditions were very close; in contrast to that, they drifted apart when the number of fans was low. Hence, friends were more important for participants' perceptions of their own attitudes towards the topic when few fans were shown. Furthermore, the lowest ratings were given for the condition with few fans and few friends while the highest rating was given for the condition with few fans and many friends. Against the background of results from study 1, the latter combination might have been perceived in such a way that the campaign was popular among friends but not yet a mainstream topic which might have raised its perceived relevance and thus the urge to agree with its message. When making derivations about potential underlying conformity goals based on the independent variables, it seems reasonable to assume that the combination of fans and friends communicated information about the topics popularity in general and thus its quality and its distribution (see discussion study 1). The combination of friend- and fan-displays might also have communicated information about attitudinal norms in a person's own network. Thus, conformity might also have been based on the goal of positive self-evaluation, as private conformity with valued others might strengthen a positive part of one's own self-image (Kelman, 1958), in line with what was suggested based on the pattern of dependent variables that were affected. In this context, the finding that the combination of few fans and many friends elicited the strongest conformity reaction can be explained by drawing onto social identity theory, which also comprises the concept of positive self-evaluation (see chapter 3.3.2.3): the more distinct the perception of the in-group (the friends in the *like*-display) in contrast to others (other fans), the stronger social identification and consequently according conformity processes (a concept often referred to as *comparative fit*, see Turner, 1991). Although SIDE (see chapter 3.3.2.3) would suggest that processes of social identification are unlikely in an environment like Facebook, no identifying information about the respective friends was given, which - according to SIDE and related research - would have made social identification more likely (Postmes et al., 1998). However, it needs to be considered at this point, that this is not the most common way to present friend-displays on Facebook (see chapter 2.4). Coming back to the present finding that attitude was affected by number of friends, also the goal for cognitive consistency might eventually offer an explanation for this effect. The (unidentifiable friends) might have caused attraction and resulting negative tension states (e.g. Prislin & Wood, 2005, Walther et al., 2012), which in turn might have been resolved by showing conformity. However, as there is no empirical information about participants' attitude towards the presented fans, derivations with regard to that goal have to be made cautiously. One conformity goal that is not able to explain the present effect is that of affiliation, as no public reaction was affected (and for the goal of affiliation to become salient, the respective influencing agent needs to learn of the target's evaluation, see Kelman, 1961).

In the context of RQ2, another conformity effect was found that only emerged when taking into account the anticipation of peers' reactions as mediator: The number of fans affected how likely participants would be to *like* the Page themselves through the feeling to what extent that would earn them positive reactions from their peers. This full mediation can be regarded as an indicator that the effect of number of fans is solely dependent on the expectation of positive reactions from the influencing agents. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume the process at work is based on the goal of affiliation, which ascribes public conformity reactions to the desire of gaining social approval or avoiding social rejection from the influencing agent(s) (e.g. Kelman, 1958, see chapter 3.3.2.2). The results in the context of RQ2 further have implications about how the influencing agents in the fan-display affect the self-presentational audience, which will be discussed in more detail later when discussing RQ2/3 and H3/4.

The next finding that seems noteworthy to further explain the processes of conformity that took place is the observation that effects differed depending on which topic was focused on. With regard to the Kony campaign, the same main effect for number of friends was observed that emerged for the whole sample, while for nuclear energy no effects were observed, suggesting that the main effect found within the whole sample can be ascribed to the Kony campaign. Taking into account the preliminary analyses which indicate that the nuclear energy campaign was more familiar and more involving than the Kony campaign, the question arises if ambiguity of the situation might have had an impact on the observed effects. According to Festinger (1954), conformity in general is more likely when a situation is ambiguous, being dependent for example on the target's prior knowledge (see chapter 3.3.3.3). Several authors ascribed the effect of ambiguity on conformity to the goal of accuracy (e.g. Baron et al., 1996; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) with influencing agents communicating information about the "right" choice, but also for example about subjective validity (Festinger, 1954). Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that the goal of accuracy might have played a role here, based on the finding that number of friends affected attitude for the less familiar topic but not for the more familiar topic. This idea is also in line with considerations based on which dependent variables were affected and which (combination of) independent variables have caused those effects. Regarding the mediated effect for number of fans on *like*-intention, a different pattern emerged. Here, the effect was replicated only in the nuclear energy subsample. Given that nuclear energy was the more familiar topic, this finding is in line with results from study 1 to the extent that participants stated to consider *liking* only with regard to topics they are familiar with. As this result seemed to be based on the goal of affiliation (see last paragraph), it can be interpreted in a way that the fan-display may have communicated information about norms and popularity associated with the desire to gain social approval by "tagging along" (male, 19; see chapter 6.4).

One aspect that needs to be discussed is the fact that several subhypotheses of H1 and H2 were unsupported. Looking at the emerging pattern - friends affecting a private reaction assumingly through the goal of accuracy/positive self-evaluation and fans affecting a public reaction assumingly through the goal of affiliation - it seems reasonable to assume that the underlying mechanisms for the effects found are fundamentally different. This in turn suggests that expecting the same effects for all dependent variables and independent variables might be an oversimplification. Based on results of study 1 and the theoretical conception, it for example is surprising that number of fans affected *like*-intention through the mechanism of affiliation, but number of friends did not. One explanation might be that within the present setting, task importance was not high enough because the situation was very artificial and no actual friends were shown in the friend-display. For example, Barons, Vandello and Brunsman (1996) discussed this issue in the context of conformity research and suggest that participants in studies might not be as affected as when they had to fear rejection from their actual peers. Apart from the manipulation, a lot of information was shown on the Pages that might have been rather salient, particularly for gaining a first impression. The analysis of the open-ended question (RQ5) supports this by suggesting that other information - or rather: lack of information - was very obvious, for example expressed in skepticism regarding the integrity of the Facebook campaign and also potential controversies, particularly with regard to the Kony topic. These results raise issues regarding the stimulus material. As participants were confronted with the Page's Timeline (and not, for example, an Ad or single post) they might have expected to find more information (posts, information section etc.) than shown here. Of course, creating the stimuli as sparsely as possible served the goal of ensuring internal validity; however, at the same time the situation might have been too artificial, which of course represents a limitation of the present study. Apart from that, several issues were mentioned in the open-ended questions that might also explain why *like*-intention was so scarcely affected number of influencing agents. In line with results from study 1, self-constructional goals seem to have represented the most relevant obstacle for not *liking* a Page or reason for *liking* a Page. At the same time, results illustrate that in the context of social campaigns, another goal for (not) *liking* a Page might be to support the campaign.

To gain a more detailed impression of how conformity motives are associated with self-presentational motives, it was investigated how *like*-displays affected the expectation of positive reactions from the audience when *liking* the Page. Here, a main effect for number of fans was found (RQ2a), indicating that a larger number led to a stronger expectation of positive reactions from peers when *liking* the Page. Furthermore, this expectation mediated the effect of number of fans on *like*-intention, suggesting that number of fans not only affected the perceived preferences of the self-presentational audience but that in turn, this had an impact on public conformity behavior - at least for those people confronted

with the nuclear energy campaign (as already mentioned above). Based on what was outlined in the comprehensive summary and with regard to the conformity effects discussed above, the mediation effect found here indicates that the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience and the conformity goal of affiliation do co-occur although the group of influencing agents and the self-presentational audience do not overlap (at least not objectively). In contrast to expectations (see comprehensive summary), the pattern that emerged here is similar to that found in classic conformity studies, although the self-presentational audience on Facebook is objectively undetermined. Nevertheless, the fan-display seemed to have made fans of the campaign to be salient as potential audience. In this context it seems interesting that it was number of fans and not number of friends which caused the effect, because one's own friends are more likely to be able to observe the respective action. However, the effect is in line with results of study 1 that indicated fan-displays may communicate how popular a product - or in this case: a campaign - is.

Taking into account which concerns about the Kony campaign were reported in the open-ended question, potential explanations of why this effect could not be reproduced for the Kony subsample can be provided. Since the Kony campaign was perceived as highly controversial, participants might have had a hard time anticipating potential audience reactions.

In the context of H3 and H4, it was observed that public self-consciousness did not serve as a moderator for social influence processes concerned with public reactions, as was hypothesized based on previous results that people with a tendency towards public self-consciousness are more likely to employ conformity as a self-presentational strategy because they are more concerned with audience reactions (e.g. Carver & Scheier, 1985 in Leary, 1995). Results however indicate that public self-consciousness did not play a role for conformity in the present context. One possible explanation for this finding is that the form of conformity affected by public self-consciousness is not the form that was assumed to be observable here. As outlined in chapter 4.5.1, it was suggested that public self-consciousness affects conformity processes based on the goal for affiliation because the respective person acts out of fear of rejection or with the aim of gaining social approval (e.g. Fenigstein, 1975 in Leary, 1995). The observation that public self-consciousness did not have an effect on conformity outcomes in the present study might be an indicator that gaining social approval was not the main goal for yielding to social influence. Looking back at results obtained for RQ2, it seems unreasonable to assume that the goal for affiliation does not play a role at all, because the observation that audience reactions serve as mediators clearly suggest so. Looking at previous studies, there exist a lot of empirical results which suggest public self-consciousness should increase audience-oriented self-presentation in the form of conformity. However, there also exist empirical results suggesting it might not be that simple. For example, a meta study conducted by Gibbons

(1990) did not reveal any clear effects. As the effects observed in this study do not follow an absolutely clear pattern - several subhypotheses were not supported - it can be assumed that the presence and type of conformity process may differ, depending on the situational characteristics, e.g. the familiarity with the topic. Considering this, it seems reasonable to investigate the role of personal characteristics that have been found to be associated with public conformity in more detail, e.g. by employing different constructs, such as self-monitoring (see chapter 4.5.2).

RQ4 was concerned with the question whether *like*-intention of the presented Pages was driven by self-presentational goals (independent of conformity goals). Findings suggest that *like*-intention is best predicted by authenticity or strategic self-censorship as self-presentational strategies. The first aspect is in line with previous results on self-presentation on SNS that suggest although self-presentation is very controllable, online users tend to be authentic rather than deceptive in their self-presentation (e.g. Back et al., 2010). The present finding suggests that also *like*-behavior is undertaken in an authentic way, which is in line with results of study 1 that suggest users do not *like* Pages they do not know or do not favor. The second aspect, strategic self-censorship, was also addressed by participants in study 1: Out of fear of negative reactions, several participants described to refrain from *liking* Pages that appear controversial. This aspect was also described as one situation in which conformity goals and self-presentational goals might overlap, with *like*-displays being indicative of the probability of negative reactions. Moreover, results of RQ5 - assessed via open-ended questions about reasons (not) to *like* a Page - support this pattern: Participants' concerns, interests and knowledge were mentioned most often as determinants of *like*-intention. Furthermore, about a sixth of all participants addressed self-censorship for political topics. As no detailed information was provided by participants, the latter finding can be interpreted in two ways: either self-censorship as a way of protecting privacy or as a means of avoiding negative reactions from others. Interpreting these finding against the background of what was outlined about motives to undertake self-presentation as a foreground agenda in social interaction (see chapter 4.3.1), it seems that self-construction in general was more important than pleasing the audience (e.g. Baumeister, 1982), although a tendency to avoid negative reactions by the audience cannot be excluded at this point.

The results of RQ5 provide another explanation for why no effects on *like*-intention was found with regard to the less familiar and more controversial Page. *Liking* seems to be largely driven by one's own preferences and regarding the Kony campaign those preferences were either not given or not clear. This again emphasizes the importance of assessing those preferences as a control variable in future research.

Before summarizing how findings of the present study contribute to the overall aim of the thesis and the respective guiding research questions, several limitations of the study need to be discussed. One aspect that needs to be considered is the perception of the control condition, as the latter would have served to add more variety to the experimental manipulations and would have helped to interpret the present findings. The control condition had to be excluded from further analysis as manipulation checks showed that participants were indecisive with regard to what they had seen, as the control condition did not differ from the few fans and few friends conditions. It raises the question whether the lack of fans or friends was perceived as the Page having no fans or as the Page displaying no number of fans. This finding raises questions with regard to the reasoning of employing a control condition in the present setting. One might assume that in the course of the everyday browsing on Facebook, users have come to know that they are unlikely to encounter a Page without any fans, which is why the lack of this information might not be interpreted in this way. Against the background of these considerations, the control condition of the present study might also be indicative of a baseline about what fan numbers users would ascribe to Facebook Pages such as the ones presented here; it appears that the low numbers of fans and friends in two of the experimental conditions were very close to that baseline as no differences between those and the control condition were found.

Further limitations can be derived from the results of the open-ended questions, as mentioned before. The finding that authenticity plays an important role for *like*-behavior suggests that not only familiarity and involvement but also previous attitude should be assessed as control variables. In the present study, it was assumed that both campaigns were generally supported based on the results of a pretest and by assigning participants randomly to the experimental conditions, confounders regarding the previous attitude were eliminated (supported by the fact that experimental conditions did not differ regarding involvement and previous familiarity). However, according to the open-ended questions it seems reasonable to include previous attitude in future questionnaires, particularly when using non-experimental approaches. Furthermore, the answers to the open-ended questions illustrate that in the context of social campaigns, another goal for (not) *liking* a Page might be to support the campaign. In this context, there might be other outcomes of conformity behavior that should be taken into account, for example support of the campaign outside of Facebook. Further answers raised issues regarding the second campaign that was chosen (Kony). It was observed that users might have perceived the topic as being more controversial than intended (even without extensive knowledge, as the second campaign was found to be less involving and less familiar), which represents another disrupting factor that needs to be taken into account, particularly when investigating *like*-intention. Also the stimulus material itself needs to be reconsidered as it might have raised participants' expectations about the amount of information they would find that were not met (see RQ5).

To summarize the present findings against the background of the guiding research questions, it can be stated that some indicators for underlying conformity motives were found (GRQ1) - the motives of positive self-evaluation and accuracy in particular can reasonably explain the present effects found for number of friends (in interaction with fans) on attitude. For conformity elicited by number of fans, affiliation goals and the respective self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience seemed to play a role. With regard to GRQ2 it was noticeable that the number of influencing agents overall was not as effective as expected (because several subhypotheses were unsupported). On the one hand, these findings suggest that conformity effects may represent different mechanisms depending on the respective goal and situational aspects. On the other hand, this raises the question which other impact factors have to be considered. Based on Baron, Vandello and Brunsman (1996), relational aspects need to be taken into account. Furthermore, findings suggest that ambiguity of the situation (and with that, familiarity and attitude) needs to be considered as an important impact factor. With regard to GRQ3 it was observable that self-construction and self-censorship were associated with *like*-intention for the overall sample (rather than the attempt to please the audience), supporting the notion of *liking* representing a means of strategic self-presentation and that the respective concern may interfere with conformity motives. Two exceptions arose in the context of RQ2b and RQ4/RQ5, namely that those people who found the perceived preferences of the self-presentational audience affected by the presented number of fans differed accordingly with regard to *like*-intention. Here, the goal of affiliation and the concern of pleasing the audience might actually co-occur because the audiences are perceived to overlap. Furthermore, the concern for negative audience reactions (particularly with regard to political topics) was identified as predictor for *like*-intention. Also here, it is imaginable that the fear of negative reactions might co-occur with the goal of affiliation. Based on the present findings, several aspects have been identified that seem worth focusing on in future research and will be subject of the final study 3.

Chapter 8

Study 3: The Impact of the Relationship towards the Influencing Agent on Conformity Reactions

8.1 Introduction and Research Questions

As announced, the third study will focus on how characteristics of the relationship towards the people presented in the *like*-display affect conformity reactions (GRQ2) in order to explore if and which derivations can be made regarding potential underlying motives for conformity (GRQ1). Also, in study 3, the interplay of conformity and self-presentational goals (GRQ3) will be considered.

In the literature review (chapter 3.3.3.2), several relationship characteristics were discussed that might affect conformity reactions, partly dependent on the goal for conformity that is salient: positive orientation, similarity and tie strength.

When discussing *positive orientation* as relational characteristic assumed to affect conformity, several concepts from different areas of social psychology (as well as cognitive psychology) were introduced. Several empirical results suggest that attraction in terms of having a positive attitude towards a person or group increases conformity (e.g. Dittes & Kelley, 1956; Lott & Lott, 1961). Positive orientation towards one's own in-group is one aspect of the process of social identification (along with self-stereotyping, e.g. Leach et al., 2008). Empirical results suggest that also social identification may affect conformity positively (e.g. Walther et al., 2010). On Facebook, it is imaginable that attraction towards a single individual can play a role, as a user has some kind of relationship towards those people shown in the friend-display. Similarly, the people in the friend-display may also be

representative of a certain group that a user feels (not) to be a part of. Although the SIDE model (chapter 3.2.3) suggests that Facebook as a *anonymous* environment (Zhao et al., 2008) is less likely to foster processes of social identification than an anonymous environment, the original social identity theory stems from a face-to-face context and the respective processes have been discussed to play a role in the context of the goal of positive self-evaluation, independent of visual or personal anonymity (chapter 3.3.2.3). The effects of positive orientation on the process of social influence can consequently be explained against the background of different conformity goals: the goal of accuracy in terms of aiming to make a "right" decision (attraction: Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; social identification: Prislin & Wood, 2005), the goal of affiliation in terms of aiming to avoid social rejection and gain social approval (because of increased means control, see chapter 3.3.2.2), the goal of positive self-evaluation in terms of social identification (e.g. Turner, 1991) and the goal of cognitive consistency in terms of bringing attitudes towards the influencing agent and towards the subject of evaluation into line with each other (previous attitude: Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955).

The second aspect that was discussed in the literature review is *similarity*. Empirical results suggest that similarity (in terms of shared characteristics) to another person may increase conformity, even if those shared characteristics are very basic in nature (e.g. students of the same program, see Abrams et al., 1990). On Facebook, it is conceivable that shared characteristics do not only refer to general aspects such as common affiliations, but also to shared interests and opinions (depending on what is expressed with a *like*). Also similarity may play a role in different kinds of conformity processes: The concept of referent informational influence (Turner, 1991) for example associates similarity with the context of the goal of accuracy and social reality testing (see also Festinger, 1954). Furthermore, similarity is an important aspect for the process of self-categorization and thus social identification, which is why the goal of positive self-evaluation has been associated with similarity in the literature review as well (see chapter 3.3.2.3, goal of positive self-evaluation).

Tie strength refers to a multidimensional construct that is conceptualized in terms of predictors and indicators (Marsden & Campbell, 1984). One aspect that predicts tie strength is *interaction frequency* between communication partners, as it determines information exchange (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Interaction frequency has often been used to measure tie strength in studies that rely on observational data, e.g. in social media (for example Bond et al., 2012, see chapter 3.2.1) and it has been found to positively affect conformity. Apart from that, indicators of tie strength - such as *closeness* or *intimacy* - have been suggested to be even more important than predictors to describe the concept (Marsden & Campbell, 1984). So far, there exist several studies that suggest a close friend is more influential than an acquaintance (e.g. Brown & Reingen, 1987); however, an in-depth investigation using self-reported measures assessing these indicators has to my knowledge not been conducted in the context of

social media. Discussing tie strength against the background of different conformity goals has been challenging (see chapter 3.3.3.2.3) because of different conceptualizations in terms of predictors and indicators. From the perspective of tie strength predictors, it was suggested that the more users interact, the more information is exchanged, be it information about similarity, means control or attraction. In that respect, predictors of tie strength serve as prerequisite for social influence (see chapter 3.3.3.2.3). With regard to indicators one might imagine that closeness or intimacy towards another person might be associated with a positive self-concept (goal of positive self-evaluation) or more means control (goal of affiliation), as already suggested in chapter 3.3.3.2.3.

Based on the literature review and results of study 1, it was noted that potentially all goals of social influence might play a role when it comes to the *like*-feature on Facebook. Results of study 2 further suggest that the goal of accuracy and the goal of positive self-evaluation in particular might be of particular relevance when it comes to the number of friends while the goal of affiliation only seemed to play a role with regard to the number of fans (see chapter 7.4, discussion study 2). Consequently, it can be stated that up to this point none of the relational characteristics outlined here can be excluded as influence factor for conformity. Consequently, for the present purpose, hypotheses will be suggested that consider the importance of the aforementioned characteristics based on what is known so far: positive orientation is considered to represent the most important aspect because it can be associated with all four motives for conformity, two of which have been found to be of relevance for friend-displays in study 2. In second place, similarity is suggested because from a theoretical perspective it is associated with those two motives that have been suggested to be of relevance based on results of study 2 as well. Tie strength will be considered to be most ambiguous aspect and consequently the relational characteristics whose role for social influence in the present context is least predictable. Of course it has been considered that tie strength (in terms of interaction frequency) has been found to affect conformity in different empirical studies on Facebook processes (see chapter 3.2.1). But it has to be mentioned that those studies focused on predictors of tie strength alone, neglecting indicators of the concept. Hence, it is not clear whether interaction frequency itself serves as predictor or whether it is a prerequisite for other relational information to be communicated. Here, it is assumed (based on Marsden and Campbell (1984) as well as aforementioned theoretical considerations) that other relational characteristics might be more important.

Before research questions about the aforementioned relational characteristics are stated, another impact factor for conformity will be discussed against the background of the literature review and results obtained to far: *ambiguity of the situation*. In chapter 3.3.3.3, it was described how previous knowledge and opinion (e.g. Price et al., 2006) of the target and also the kind of task (preference vs. objective tasks, see Prislin & Wood, 2005) affect conformity. To summarize, conformity has been

found to be stronger and more likely when performing ambiguous tasks, for example when previous knowledge is low and there is no strong previous opinion (e.g. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). In line with that, also results of study 1 suggest that the variety of conformity reactions decreases when a topic is familiar. Furthermore, the more familiar a product was, the more likely the friend-display was to hold information about the respective friends rather than the product. Consequently, it was assumed that *like*-displays might fulfill different purposes (associated with different goals), depending on whether the topic of a Facebook Page is known or unknown: With regard to an unfamiliar topic, *like*-displays have for example been found to be indicative of popularity and quality (associated with the goal of accuracy or partly with the goal of affiliation - by suggesting one may have missed something important). Furthermore, friend-displays in particular have been found to communicate information about the target group of an unknown product (see chapter 6.4, discussion study 1). For familiar topics, *like*-displays were reported to contain information about the respective norms (suggested to be associated with affiliation goals) or common interests (suggested to be associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation). Furthermore, when the topic is familiar, a feeling of balance or imbalance has been reported to arise (associated with the goal of cognitive consistency), depending on whether the attitude towards the people in the *like*-display fits. As already mentioned in the discussion of study 1, these possibilities draw a complex picture of potential conformity processes.

To summarize, results obtained so far suggest that familiarity with the topic (along with previous attitude) might affect social influence and may even interact with relational aspects, depending on which goal is salient. Furthermore, conformity reactions might be dependent on which kind of reaction is focused: public or private (see also chapter 3.3.1). Just like in study 2, the formation of an attitude will be considered as a private reaction (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) in the present study 3. *Liking* will be regarded as a public reaction, since other Facebook contacts can observe this behavior. Based on results of the open-ended questions in study 2, another aspect will be included: anonymous support behavior outside of Facebook in terms of signing an anonymous competition.

The aforementioned relational characteristics have not - to my knowledge - been investigated in this constellation (along with familiarity of the topic), but based on previous results, a positive relationship between relational aspects and conformity behavior is assumed:

H1 - Relational aspects / familiar topic

H1a: Positive orientation towards, identification with, similarity to and tie strength (closeness and interaction frequency) regarding the friends presented in the *like*-display serve as (positive) predictors for *like*-intention regarding the Page of a familiar topic

H1b: Positive orientation towards, identification with, similarity to and tie strength (closeness and interaction frequency) regarding the friends presented in the *like*-display serve as (positive) predictors for attitude regarding the Page of a familiar topic

H1c: Positive orientation towards, identification with, similarity with and tie strength (closeness and interaction frequency) regarding the friends presented in the *like*-display serve as (positive) predictors for private support behavior regarding the Page of a familiar topic

H2 - Relational aspects / unfamiliar topic

H2a: Positive orientation towards, identification with, similarity to and tie strength (closeness and interaction frequency) regarding the friends presented in the *like*-display serve as (positive) predictors for *like*-intention regarding the Page of an unfamiliar topic

H2b: Positive orientation towards, identification with, similarity to and tie strength (closeness and interaction frequency) regarding the friends presented in the *like*-display serve as (positive) predictors for attitude regarding the Page of an unfamiliar topic

H2c: Positive orientation towards, identification with, similarity to and tie strength (closeness and interaction frequency) regarding the friends presented in the *like*-display serve as (positive) predictors for private support behavior regarding the Page of an unfamiliar topic

Also in study 3, the interplay of potential conformity goals and self-presentational goals will be considered, because study 3 focuses on the impact of relational characteristics on social influence. Consequently, two aspects - the perception of the self-presentational audience and the role of self-monitoring - will be investigated (again) with regard to their role in the present processes to explore the role of self-presentational goals.

In general, the literature review shows that the expectation of positive reactions from peers can affect conformity behavior, because the affiliation goal of conformity aims at pleasing others (e.g. Turner, 1991), just like the self-presentational concern of pleasing the audience (e.g. Leary, 1995). Consequently, both the conformity goal and the self-presentational concern match well together when the influencing agent represents the self-presentational audience, while a third party may change that (Braver, Linder, Corvin & Cialdini, 1977 in Turner, 1991). As outlined in the comprehensive summary of the literature review, goals for self-presentation and goals for conformity might compete on SNS. In detail, it was assumed that the conformity situation here was inherently different from that of classic conformity studies as no derivations about the preferences of the self-presentational audience could

be made based on the *like*-display. This was suggested based on the observation that the audience on Facebook is largely undetermined (e.g. chapter 4.6.1.3) and does not necessarily overlap with the group of people presented in the *like*-display. Results of study 2 however suggest that at least with regard to the fan-displays, the situation is indeed very similar to that of classic conformity studies because it appears the fan-display affects the perceived self-presentational audience and this in turn leads to conformity behavior. As outlined in the last paragraph, it seems worthwhile to repeat the analysis procedure with regard to the impact of relational aspects of friend-displays to determine if affiliation goals might play a role here.

RQ1 - The role of perceived preferences of the self-presentational audience / familiar topic

RQ1a: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of positive orientation on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ1b: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of identification on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ1c: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of similarity on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ1d: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of interaction frequency on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ1e: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of closeness on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ2 - The role of perceived preferences of the self-presentational audience / unfamiliar topic

RQ2a: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of positive orientation on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ2b: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of identification on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ2c: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of similarity on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ2d: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of interaction frequency on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ2e: Does the expectation of positive audience reactions when *liking* a Page mediate the effect of closeness on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

In the literature review, several personality characteristics were introduced that have been assumed and found to determine a person's tendency to give attention to the impressions he/she conveys to others (chapter 4.5). For example, it was suggested that people with a high public self-consciousness should be more susceptible to public conformity, based on the theoretical concept (chapter 4.5.1) and also empirical results from a SNS context (chapter 4.6.2.3). In study 2 however, it was found that public self-consciousness did not affect the impact of number of fans and friends on public conformity, indicating that people with a higher public self-consciousness - and thus a stronger tendency to be aware of their public image - did not show stronger conformity, as expected. In the discussion of study 2 it was suggested that the lack of effects may have been based on the fact that the interplay of factors that determine conformity based on the goal of affiliation are more complex. While the construct of public self-consciousness describes a general outward-directed concern for the impression one conveys, different self-presentational preferences are not considered. In the literature review, it was for example suggested that self-presentational concerns may stem from two different motivational systems - the fear of rejection and the expectation of approval (Arkin, 1981; Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986). It was furthermore argued that the fear of rejection in particular - reflected in a protective self-monitoring tendency (Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986) - may play an important role in conformity processes (Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986). Consequently, the interplay of self-presentational concerns and conformity goals will be further investigated in study 3 by exploring protective self-monitoring as a personality characteristic which potentially affects public conformity behavior. Self-monitoring describes the tendency to monitor and control one's public behavior (Mummendey et al., 1995) and - different from public self-consciousness - recent conceptualizations have identified two different components of this construct that represent different strategies for self-presentation, namely acquisitive and protective self-presentation (Arkin, 1981). This conceptualization acknowledges the complexity of self-presentational strategies that was neglected in the original concept of self-monitoring (Snyder 1974 in Mummendey et al., 1995). In particular, the protective component of self-monitoring (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984) is suggested to represent a viable concept to assess people's tendency towards public conformity (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986), as it describes the extent to which people shape their self-presentation in order to avoid social rejection instead of gaining social approval (e.g. Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986). The assumption is that the higher the tendency towards protective self-monitoring, the stronger the conformity effect - if the latter is based on the goal of affiliation. Based on results of study 2 it cannot be clearly stated whether friend-displays might elicit conformity based on that goal (see last section), hence it seems reasonable to work with research questions this time (rather than hypotheses, as done in study 2). Depending on the results, further derivations can be made with regard to the

potential underlying conformity goals when it comes to friend-displays. Consequently, in order to further investigate how personality characteristics affect conformity behavior in the present situation, the following research questions are stated:

RQ3 - protective self-monitoring / familiar topic

RQ3a: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of positive orientation on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ3b: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of identification on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ3c: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of similarity on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ3d: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of interaction frequency on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ3e: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of closeness on *like*-intention with regard to the familiar campaign?

RQ4 - protective self-monitoring / unfamiliar topic

RQ4a: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of positive orientation on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ4b: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of identification on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ4c: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of similarity on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ4d: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of interaction frequency on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

RQ4e: Does a person's tendency towards protective self-monitoring increase the effect of closeness on *like*-intention with regard to the unfamiliar campaign?

Finally, just like in study 2, a qualitative component will be added to assess participants' reasons for (not) *liking* the presented Pages to see if goals for conformity or self-presentation can be observed.

RQ5: Which goals for self-presentation or conformity are mentioned as reasons (not) to *like* the presented Pages?

8.2 Method

8.2.1 Sample and Procedure

Study 3 employed a correlative approach, using a Page recommendation similar to a Facebook Ad as stimulus and assessing relational aspects towards the friends shown in the *like*-display as potential predictors for conformity reactions.

Between March and May 2013, 110 students participated in the IRB-approved laboratory study on the campus of the University of Duisburg-Essen (up to 5 people participated in each session). Participants were recruited in undergraduate lectures as well as on campus and they were rewarded with credits for their participation. 19 participants had to be removed from the final sample, either because their privacy settings on Facebook did not allow the creation of the stimulus or because they had seen their own profile photo in the stimulus (details to follow). The final sample thus consisted of 91 participants (69.3% female), 18 to 37 years old ($M = 21.57$, $SD = 3.10$). They had been Facebook users between 0.17 and 7 years ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.23$), reported to have between 15 and 894 Facebook friends ($M = 302.01$, $SD = 181.80$) and to have *liked* between 0 and 646 Facebook Pages ($M = 61.31$, $SD = 88.86$). Participants had spent between 0 and 14 hours on Facebook the previous week ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 2.63$).

On arrival at the lab, participants were introduced to and informed about the topic of the study (evaluation of Facebook Ads). Before starting the questionnaire, they were asked to log into their Facebook account, seemingly for the purpose of being able to look up certain information on their profile (number of friends, number of *likes*). At the beginning of the questionnaire (details see figure 11), participants filled out general information about their Facebook use. After that, the topic of the first Ad about to be shown was named and participants' familiarity, involvement and attitude regarding the topic were assessed. The next Page contained the stimulus Facebook Ad (including a *like*-display, showing friends who were fans) and after that, criterium variables were assessed. The same procedure was employed for the second Ad, whereby the presentation order of both Ads was randomized. After rating the criterium variables for both Ads, participants filled out further questions about what they had seen in the *like*-displays, including number of fans and friends as well as relational aspects, which served as predictor variables. The questionnaire ended with the assessment of self-monitoring preferences and demographic aspects.

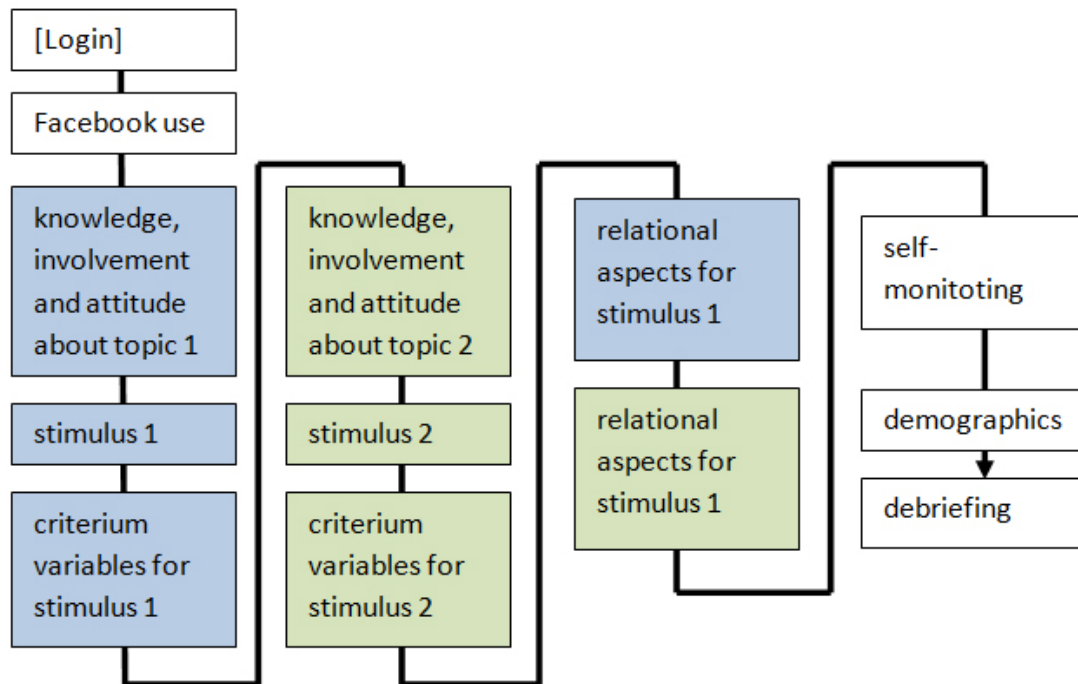


Figure 11. Overview Procedure and Questionnaire Study 3

The actual purpose of having had participants log into their Facebook account before starting the questionnaire was that the two Facebook Ads presented should present members of their own Facebook network as fans of the respective Page (a friend-display). After finishing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed about this fact. No recordings were made of anything participants had seen; the respective information was solely assessed via questionnaire. Cookies were deleted after every session. If requested, participants received further information about the plugin used to generate the Ad (a "Facepile", see next section).

8.2.2 Stimulus

As stimulus, two Facebook campaigns were used based on results of the pretest and study 2. This time, the stimuli were chosen to cover two topics that clearly differed in familiarity and involvement. As a familiar topic, *nuclear energy* was chosen again, based on results of the pretest and study 2. It was decided not to employ the *Kony* campaign again because of several issues participants of study 2 had raised in the open-ended questions, e.g. regarding controversies about the campaign. An unfamiliar topic was chosen instead, based on which topic participants of the pretest were least able to give a clear opinion because they were unfamiliar with it (assessed via the use of the "I'm not familiar with the topic or don't have an opinion about it"-option in the pretest, see study 2). Consequently, the

monks' protest in Burma was chosen as second campaign topic because only 4 out of 24 participants had stated to be able to give their opinion about it.

The plugin used to generate the respective stimulus Facebook Ad is called "Facepile". It is provided by Facebook as a means to "display[s] the Facebook profile photos of people who have connected with your Facebook page or app" (Facebook Developers, 2014). The plugin allows any user to enter any URL of a Facebook Page to display the number of fans and - if the viewer is logged into their own Facebook account - friends who have *liked* the Page. The appearance of the Facepile can be customized (e.g., background, size). The Facepile does not display the name of the Facebook Page in question, just the overall number of fans, names of friends who have *liked* the Page and several profile photos, depending on the chosen size of the Facepile. In the questionnaire, the Facepile code (html) was combined with another html code that created a title as well as a Page profile photo to generate an artificial Facebook Ad. Figure 12 displays a mock-up of the original stimulus, meant to illustrate the set-up of the stimulus Ads. In the original stimulus, the placeholders were replaced with the Title of the respective Page, its profile photo and profile photos and names of participants' actual friends. The red frame marks the content of the Facepile plugin within the presented Ad.

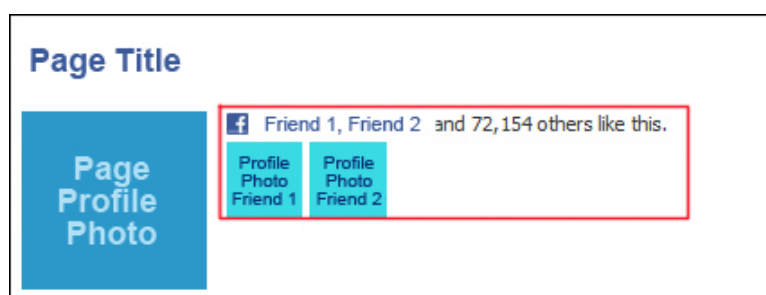


Figure 12. Set-Up of Stimulus Ads used in Study 3

One aspect that needed to be considered when creating the Facepiles was the necessity for clear derivations regarding causality. If the nuclear energy Ad had employed a Facepile that received its data from the Facebook Page of the actual "Nuclear Energy? No, thanks!" campaign, this would not have been possible. For example, if a participant had perceived the respective people in the associated *like*-display as being similar to him/herself and had rated the campaign favorably it would not have been clear if the attitude had been caused by the relationship towards those friends or if the fact that the participant had already a very strong positive opinion about the topic caused similar friends to be displayed in the Facepile. For that reason, it was decided to feed the Facepile with data from another Page, different from the one suggested by the title and the Page's profile photo. After extensive pretesting, two Pages were chosen that fulfilled the purpose of generating an Ad that was perceived as being credible in the context of the two stimulus campaigns but were

concerned with different topics: The *nuclear energy* campaign photo and title were paired with the Facepile of the Facebook Page of a reputable German news magazine (TV), the *Tagesschau*¹, and the *Burma* campaign title and photo were paired with the Facepile extracted from the Facebook Page of a reputable newspaper, *Die Zeit*². It is assumed that these Facepiles were perceived as being credible when paired with the stimulus campaigns during the pretests because people who have *liked* a newspaper or news magazine were likely to be interested in social issues.

As shown in the example stimuli in Figure 12, the Facepiles also displayed an overall number of fans. As it was not possible (due to the nature of the Facepile code) to manipulate and thus control this number (it differed between both stimuli and also slightly increased during the course of the survey period because of new *likes*), it was decided to assess participants' perception of this number to be used as control variable in the analyses.

8.2.3 Measures

All variables concerned with the assessment of reactions towards and content of the presented Ads were presented twice within the questionnaire, once for each Ad. This concerned criterion variables, predictors and control variables about the respective topic. Table 13 presents an overview of all assessed constructs and their role in the present research.

8.2.3.1 Criterion Variables and Mediator

Criterion variables assessed in study 3 were measured almost the same way as in study 2.

Regarding the **like-intention**, participants were asked how *likely they were to like the Page*, measured via a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "fully disagree" to 7 = "fully agree".

The perception to what extent *the Page's statement reflected participants' own opinion* (measured on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "fully disagree" to 7 = "fully agree") was used to assess **subsequent attitude**.

In addition to measurements already used in study 2, participants' **private support behavior** was assessed using one self-constructed item asking how *likely they would be to sign a petition (anonymously)*. The item was measured on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "very unlikely" to 7 = "very likely".

¹<http://www.facebook.com/tagesschau>

²<http://www.facebook.com/zeitonline>

Table 13: Overview of Measurements, Study 3

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Criterion variables | <i>Like</i> -Intention regarding the campaign Page Subsequent attitude towards the subject Private support behavior regarding the campaign |
| Mediator | Anticipated audience reactions in case of <i>liking</i> the campaign Page |
| Predictors | Positive orientation towards people in the friend-display Identification with people in the friend-display Similarity to people in the friend-display Tie strength: closeness to people in the friend-display Tie strength: interaction frequency with people in the friend-display |
| Control variables | Previous attitude about the campaign subject Involvement with the campaign subject Familiarity with the campaign subject Number of fans in the fan-display Facebook intensity |
| Moderator | Tendency towards protective self-monitoring |

To assess whether participants **expected positive feedback from the audience when liking the Page**, one self-constructed item was added to the questionnaire, just like in study 2 (assessed on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "fully disagree" to 7 = "fully agree"): *I think I would get positive feedback from my peers if I liked the Page*.

Also, an open-ended question was added to the questionnaire which asked participants to describe why or **why not they would like the respective Page**. 90 participants answered the open-ended question for the *nuclear energy* campaign and 91 answered it for the *Burma* campaign. All answers were categorized together, using a mainly inductive approach, partly based on results of study 1. 20% of the material was cross-coded by a second person, resulting in a sufficient inter rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = .80$).

8.2.3.2 Predictors

For the assessment of the predictors, a filter was incorporated into the questionnaire that presented questions about the *like*-display according to what participants had seen in the Ad. As a consequence, only those people presented with one or several friends in their *like*-display ($n = 79$ for *nuclear energy*, $n = 78$ for *Burma*) were confronted with questions about respective tie strength, positive orientation, number of and identification with the associated friends. The wording of the latter was adapted depending on whether one friend or several friends had been shown.

If several friends had been presented, the instruction asked participants to answer the aforementioned questions about that friend or those friends who had been most salient and who they could remember best. The instruction of the identification scale asked participants to imagine which group of their social life the presented friend(s) was/were most representative of.

First, a scale was constructed based on quotes participants had made in the interview study (study 1), which covered statements about **tie strength**, such as closeness (an indicator of tie strength) and interaction frequency (a predictor of tie strength), but also statements about attitude towards and experiences with a person. The scale comprised 15 items, each rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "do not agree" to 7 = "do fully agree". Results of an exploratory factor analysis (parallel analysis as suggested by Horn (1965), conducted for the *nuclear energy* campaign and the *Burma* campaign separately) revealed three components (see table 14 and 15): closeness (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .888$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .842$), interaction frequency (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .887$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .894$) and positive orientation towards those people/that person (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .810$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .696$). Conceptually, the last factor was assigned to positive orientation as a predictor while interaction frequency and closeness were assigned to the construct of tie strength.

Table 14: Pattern Matrix for Principal Axis Analysis for the Nuclear Energy Campaign

| | Factor | | |
|---|--------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| | Interaction Frequency | Closeness | Positive Ori- entation |
| I often talk to these people. | .950 | | |
| I have a lot of contact with these people in everyday life. | .893 | | |
| I haven't seen these people in a while (rev). | .881 | | |
| I am well concerned with these people. | .799 | | |
| I only have occasional contact with these people (rev). | .432 | | |
| I would describe these people as acquaintances. | .404 | | |
| I feel close to these people. | | .832 | |
| I have an emotional bond with these people. | | .822 | |
| I associate these people with a superficial friend- ship (rev) | | .688 | |
| These people are among my best friends. | | .636 | |
| These people are important to me. | | .617 | |
| I identify with these people. | | .617 | |
| I don't like these people (rev). | | | .892 |
| I associate these people with bad experiences (rev). | | | .708 |
| I like these people. | | | .676 |

Factor Loadings below .4 are suppressed

Table 15: Pattern Matrix for Principal Axis Analysis for the Burma Campaign

| | Factor | | |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| | Closeness | Interaction Frequency | Positive Orientation |
| I feel close to these people. | .814 | | |
| I have an emotional bond with these people. | .786 | | |
| These people are important to me. | .785 | | |
| I like these people. | .692 | | |
| I identify with these people. | .607 | | |
| These people are among my best friends. | .542 | | |
| I would describe these people as acquaintances. | .465 | | |
| I associate these people with a superficial friendship (rev) | | | |
| I have a lot of contact with these people in everyday life. | | .924 | |
| I often talk to these people. | | .840 | |
| I am well concerned with these people. | | .828 | |
| I haven't seen these people in a while (rev). | | .778 | |
| I only have occasional contact with these people (rev). | | .442 | |
| I associate these people with bad experiences (rev). | | | .722 |
| I don't like these people (rev). | | | .720 |

Factor Loadings below .4 are suppressed

In-group attraction as part of the social identification construct was introduced at the beginning of study 3 as one possible conceptualization of positive orientation towards a group. Consequently, several items from a **social identification** scale were added to the questionnaire. The entire social identification scale was developed by Leach et al. (2008) and comprises several aspects of the social identification construct, such as self-stereotyping, in-group homogeneity and also satisfaction. For the purpose of assessing positive orientation towards a group, the subscales *Centrality* (3 items, e.g. *Being one of these people is important how I see myself*) and *Satisfaction* (3 items, e.g. *I am glad that I'm one of these people*) were used. The instruction asked participants to rate their feeling towards the group of friends they had seen or - if they had seen only one friend - the group of friends they felt that person represented. All items were rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "does not apply" to 7 = "fully applies". For further analyses, the scale mean was constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .905$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .921$).

To measure **similarity**, three self-constructed items were used based on the results of the interview study, which were rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "do not agree" to 7 = "do fully agree": *These people are like me*, *We share a similar taste* and *We share the same sense of humor* (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .749$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .822$).

8.2.3.3 Control Variables and Moderator

Protective self-monitoring was assessed using both subscales of the Concern for Appropriateness Scale meant to assess the tendency towards protective self-presentation suggested by Wolfe, Lennox and Cutler (1986): *Cross-Situational Variability of Behavior* (6 items rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "do not agree" to 7 = "fully agree", for example *To avoid rejection I present different aspects of myself to different people*) and *Attention to Social Comparison Information* (6 items rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "do not agree" to 7 = "fully agree", for example *When I don't know how to behave in a certain situation I look to the behavior of others*). In order to create a single instrument for protective self-monitoring, the overall scale mean for the Concern for Appropriateness Scale was calculated (Cronbach's $\alpha = .873$).

Just like in study 2, **involvement with the campaign topic** was measured using seven items (e.g. *important/unimportant*, *of no concern/of concern to me*) from the Revised Product Involvement Inventory (RPII, McQuarrie & Munson, 1991), assessed on a seven point bipolar scale. The scale mean was constructed for further analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .942$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .925$).

In the present study, **previous opinion** about the respective campaign topic was assessed (before presenting the stimulus), by asking participants *how they personally felt about nuclear energy/the monks' protest in Burma*, rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "against it" to 7 = "in favor of it".

Familiarity with the topic was again measured with the help of the three self-constructed items already used in study 2: *I have concerned myself with the topic in detail*, *I know a lot about the topic* and *I am uninformed about the topic* (reversed item). All items were rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". For further analysis, the mean scores were created (Cronbach's $\alpha_{NE} = .831$, Cronbach's $\alpha_{BU} = .698$).

Six items of the Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison et al., 2007) were used to assess **Facebook intensity** as a control variable (e.g. *Facebook is part of my everyday activity* and *Facebook has become part of my daily routine*). All items were rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". For further analysis, the scale mean was calculated (Cronbach's $\alpha = .811$).

Finally, participants' perception of the **number of fans** shown in the *like*-display was assessed as control variable, using one item: *What was your perception of the number of fans?* (measured on a seven point Likert scale from 1 = "there were very few of them" to 7 = "there were quite a lot of them"). Furthermore, one additional (open-ended) question was integrated that asked participants to recount the *exact number of fans* they'd seen with an "I don not remember"-Option. Out of 91 participants, only 59 could recount a certain number for the *nuclear energy* campaign (64.8%) and 52 for the *Burma* campaign (57.1%). Consequently, only the subjective item was used as control variable.

8.2.3.4 Demographics and Facebook Use

Participants' *like*-behavior was assessed by asking them *how many Pages they had liked in the past* (open-ended question). Furthermore, they were asked *how much time they had spent on Facebook the previous week* and *how many Facebook friends they had*. Demographic measures included *age* and *gender*.

8.3 Results

8.3.1 Preliminary Analyses

Several analyses were conducted before testing hypotheses to ensure the *like*-displays (relational aspects and number of friends shown) in the stimulus shown were independent of participants' previous attitude (see stimulus section).

For this purpose, five hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for each stimulus, one for each potential predictor covered in the research questions (*positive orientation, identification, similarity, closeness* and *interaction frequency*) as criterium. For all regression analyses, *involvement* with the subject, *familiarity* with the subject and *previous opinion* were entered as predictors in subsequent steps.

For the *nuclear energy* campaign, the following results emerged: None of the predictors significantly contributed to the overall explained variance of *positive orientation, identification, similarity, closeness* and *interaction frequency* with friends. Hence, it can be assumed that the stimulus generated for the *nuclear energy* campaign was independent of the participants' *previous attitude* towards the subject.

For the *Burma* campaign, a similar pattern emerged: none of the predictors were able to significantly contribute to the overall explained variance of *positive orientation, identification, similarity* and *closeness*. However, *previous attitude* towards the topic showed a significant change in R^2 regarding *interaction frequency* ($\Delta R^2 = .040$, $F = 4.091$, $p = .046$). The final model suggests a negative relationship between *previous attitude* (in favor of) and the *interaction frequency* participants shared with the friends shown in the *like*-display ($\beta = -.228$, $SE = .103$, $p = .046$). This result has to be taken into account when potential effects of the interaction frequency on the outcome variables are interpreted. Apart from that, it can be assumed that the presented stimulus for the *Burma* campaign was independent of participants' previous attitude towards the subject.

Furthermore, the preliminary analyses aimed to determine differences between the two subjects shown in the stimuli. As outlined in the stimulus section, the selection aimed to cover two subjects that clearly differed in familiarity. For this purpose, a repeated measures MANOVA was conducted, entering subject *involvement, familiarity* and *previous attitude* about the subject (not the campaign) as dependent variables and defining *campaign subject* as repeated-measures factor with two levels. A multivariate within-subject effect was observed (Wilk's $\lambda = .212$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the *nuclear energy* subject was more involving ($F(1,89) = 190.576$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .682$), more familiar ($F(1,89) = 208.461$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .701$), but supported less strongly ($F(1,89) = 84.728$, $p < .001$,

Table 16: Means and Standard Deviations for the Main Effects between Campaign Subjects

| | Nuclear Energy | | | Burma Protests | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> |
| Involvement | 5.09 | 1.19 | 90 | 3.07 | 1.31 | 90 |
| Familiarity | 4.18 | 1.36 | 90 | 1.88 | 1.19 | 90 |
| Previous (positive) attitude | 2.67 | 1.42 | 90 | 4.28 | 0.87 | 90 |

$\eta p^2 = .488$) than the *Burma* subject. Here, support does not refer to the campaign message but to the topic of the campaign itself. So it is not the (anti-) *nuclear energy* campaign that is supported less than the *Burma* campaign but *nuclear energy* that is supported less than the *Burma* protests. Means and standard deviations are presented in table 16. These results need to be taken into account when interpreting findings of the following analyses.

8.3.2 Effects of Relational Aspects (H1 + H2)

Hypothesis 1 (a-c) assumed that relational aspects can predict conformity regarding the familiar campaign subject. To test H1, several hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for the different criterium variables (z-standardized scores were used for all included variables). In every analysis, *involvement*, *familiarity*, *previous attitude*, *Facebook intensity* and *number of fans* were entered as control variables in the first step. The predictors were entered after that in subsequent steps, beginning with the most important ones based on theoretical considerations (see introduction). Consequently, predictors were entered in the following order: *positive orientation*, *identification*, *similarity*, *interaction frequency* and *closeness*.

For H1a, *like-intention* for the *anti-nuclear energy* campaign Page was employed as criterium in the regression analysis. As results show, apart from the block of control variables ($\Delta R^2 = .323$, $F = 6.885$, $p < .001$), only the fourth step - comprising *similarity* - added significantly to the overall explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .041$, $F = 4.703$, $p = .039$). In the final model (Model 6, explaining a variance of 40.4% see table 17), *similarity* with the displayed friends showed a positive association with *like-intention* of the Page, just like *involvement* with the topic. *Positive previous attitude* towards the topic was negatively related to *like-intention* of the Page.

Table 17: Regression Coefficients for H1a

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE B$ |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------|--------|
| Model 1 | .323 | .317* | 6.885 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.315** | .097 |
| Involvement | | | | .342*** | .141 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.053 | .134 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .265*** | .100 |
| Number of fans | | | | .081 | .094 |
| Model 2 | .324 | .000 | .048 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.316** | .098 |
| Involvement | | | | .346*** | .143 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.055 | .135 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .261*** | .101 |
| Number of fans | | | | .078 | .096 |
| Positive orientation | | | | .023 | .103 |
| Model 3 | .351 | .027 | 2.902 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.298*** | .096 |
| Involvement | | | | .285*** | .145 |
| Familiarity | | | | .011 | .135 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .243*** | .101 |
| Number of fans | | | | .034 | .098 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.004 | .103 |
| Identification | | | | .182 | .101 |
| Model 4 | .392 | .041*** | 4.703 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.262*** | .095 |
| Involvement | | | | .370*** | .147 |
| Familiarity | | | | .047 | .137 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .186 | .102 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.027 | .099 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.058 | .104 |
| Identification | | | | .151 | .099 |
| Similarity | | | | .245*** | .111 |

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Table 17 – continued from previous page

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE B$ |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------|--------|
| Model 5 | .402 | .009 | 1.053 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.243*** | .097 |
| Involvement | | | | .351*** | .148 |
| Familiarity | | | | .012 | .141 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .194 | .102 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.024 | .099 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.029 | .108 |
| Identification | | | | .191 | .106 |
| Similarity | | | | .274*** | .115 |
| Interaction frequency | | | | -.121 | .117 |
| Model 6 | .404 | .002 | .239 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.236*** | .098 |
| Involvement | | | | .345*** | .148 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.006 | .141 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .200 | .103 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.012 | .102 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.026 | .109 |
| Identification | | | | .185 | .107 |
| Similarity | | | | .245*** | .129 |
| Interaction frequency | | | | -.179 | .166 |
| Closeness | | | | .085 | .177 |

* $p < .001$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .05$

To test H1b, the procedure was repeated, this time using *subsequent attitude* as criterium variable in the regression analysis. Results show that only the block of control variables added significantly of the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .481$, $F = 12.258$, $p < .001$), with *previous positive attitude* regarding the topic being negatively related to the feeling that the campaign reflected one's own opinion ($\beta = -.628$, $SE = .094$, $p < .001$). None of the other predictors significantly added to explaining variance in participants' opinion about the nuclear energy campaign.

Finally, also H1c was tested using the hierarchical regression analysis with *private support behavior* as criterium variable, asking how likely participants were to sign a petition for the campaign. A significant effect for the block of control variables emerged ($\Delta R^2 = .411$, $F = 10.036$, $p < .001$), with

Facebook intensity and *involvement* with the topic being positively and *previous attitude* regarding the topic being negatively associated with *support behavior*. Furthermore, in the final model 6, *similarity* with the displayed friends was observed to be significantly and positively related to *support behavior* regarding the *nuclear energy* campaign ($\beta = .314$, $SE = .128$, $p = .019$) even if the respective block only significantly contributed to the explained variance when considering an α -level of .06 (Conn et al., 2014, $\Delta R^2 = .027$, $F = 3.470$, $p = .060$). For full overview of all 6 models, see table 18.

Table 18: Regression Coefficients for H1c

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE B$ |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------|--------|
| Model 1 | .411 | .411* | 10.036 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.313** | .097 |
| Involvement | | | | .415** | .141 |
| Familiarity | | | | .025 | .134 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .254*** | .100 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.015 | .094 |
| Model 2 | .421 | .011 | 1.322 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.308** | .097 |
| Involvement | | | | .400** | .142 |
| Familiarity | | | | .025 | .134 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .272*** | .101 |
| Number of fans | | | | .003 | .095 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.107 | .103 |
| Model 3 | .426 | .005 | .591 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.301** | .097 |
| Involvement | | | | .375*** | .146 |
| Familiarity | | | | .062 | .139 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .263*** | .102 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.016 | .098 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.118 | .104 |
| Identification | | | | .077 | .102 |
| Model 4 | .454 | .027**** | 3.470 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.272*** | .097 |
| Involvement | | | | .443** | .149 |

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Table 18 – continued from previous page

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE B$ |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------|--------|
| Familiarity | | | | .016 | .139 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .217*** | .103 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.065 | .100 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.162 | .106 |
| Identification | | | | .052 | .101 |
| Similarity | | | | .199**** | .113 |
| Model 5 | .457 | .004 | .440 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.260*** | .099 |
| Involvement | | | | .432** | .151 |
| Familiarity | | | | .037 | .143 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .222*** | .104 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.064 | .101 |
| Positive orientation | | | | .145 | .110 |
| Identification | | | | .077 | .108 |
| Similarity | | | | .217**** | .117 |
| Interaction frequency | | | | -.075 | .119 |
| Model 6 | .482 | .025 | 3.233 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | -.283*** | .098 |
| Involvement | | | | .452** | .149 |
| Familiarity | | | | .016 | .142 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .201*** | .101 |
| Number of fans | | | | -.105 | .102 |
| Positive orientation | | | | .153 | .108 |
| Identification | | | | .098 | .107 |
| Similarity | | | | .314*** | .128 |
| Interaction frequency | | | | .124 | .166 |
| Closeness | | | | -.291 | .177 |

*p < .001, **p < .005, ***p < .05, ****p < .06

H2 was concerned with the question how relational aspects affect conformity behavior in the context of an unfamiliar campaign, namely the *Burma* campaign. In order to test H2, several hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In each analysis, the criterium variable was varied (depending

on the sub-hypothesis), but the rest of the procedure was held constant: *involvement* with the topic, *familiarity* with the topic, *Facebook intensity*, *number of fans* and *previous attitude* about the topic were entered as control variables in the first step. The predictors were entered after that in subsequent steps: *positive orientation* towards displayed friends, respective *identification*, *similarity* with the presented friends, and both components of tie strength, *interaction frequency* and *closeness*. All scores were z-standardized.

To investigate H2a, *like-intention* regarding the Page was entered as criterium. Results show that none of the steps of the analysis added to the explained variance when considering an α -level of 95%. However, in the final model 6 (explaining 36.8% of observed variance) *similarity* with the presented friends was found to be positively associated with *like-intention* ($\beta = .318$, $SE = .123$, $p = .023$) regarding the *Burma* campaign. When looking at how the respective block added to the explained variance (see table 19, an effect would only be observable at an α -level of .06 (Conn et al., 2014, $\Delta R^2 = .034$, $F = 3.449$, $p = .058$).

Table 19: Regression Coefficients for H2a

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE B$ |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|---------|--------|
| Model 1 | .287 | .287 | 5.706 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | .103 | .119 |
| Involvement | | | | .180 | .118 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.027 | .118 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .358** | .111 |
| Number of fans | | | | .471* | .119 |
| Model 2 | .288 | .001 | .090 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | .103 | .120 |
| Involvement | | | | .179 | .119 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.022 | .120 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .351** | .114 |
| Number of fans | | | | .468* | .107 |
| Positive orientation | | | | .031 | .117 |
| Model 3 | .298 | .010 | .995 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | .108 | .120 |
| Involvement | | | | .172 | .120 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.025 | .120 |

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Table 19 – continued from previous page

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE B$ |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------|--------|
| Facebook intensity | | | | .343** | .114 |
| Number of fans | | | | .481* | .108 |
| Positive orientation | | | | .017 | .118 |
| Identification | | | | .104 | .099 |
| Model 4 | .332 | .034**** | 3.449 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | .113 | .118 |
| Involvement | | | | .134 | .119 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.011 | .118 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .317** | .113 |
| Number of fans | | | | .461* | .107 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.014 | .118 |
| Identification | | | | .101 | .097 |
| Similarity | | | | .192**** | .101 |
| Model 5 | .332 | .000 | .010 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | .114 | .120 |
| Involvement | | | | .134 | .120 |
| Familiarity | | | | -.014 | .122 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .316*** | .115 |
| Number of fans | | | | .459* | .109 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.012 | .120 |
| Identification | | | | .100 | .098 |
| Similarity | | | | .188 | .107 |
| Interaction frequency | | | | .011 | .116 |
| Model 6 | .368 | .037 | 3.817 | | |
| Previous attitude about the subject | | | | .121 | .118 |
| Involvement | | | | .121 | .118 |
| Familiarity | | | | .006 | .120 |
| Facebook intensity | | | | .266*** | .126 |
| Number of fans | | | | .450* | .106 |
| Positive orientation | | | | -.033 | .118 |
| Identification | | | | .082 | .097 |

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Table 19 – continued from previous page

| | R^2 | ΔR^2 | ΔF | β | $SE\ B$ |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|------------|---------|---------|
| Similarity | | | | .318*** | .123 |
| Interaction frequency | | | | .209 | .154 |
| Closeness | | | | -.327 | .171 |

* $p < .001$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .05$, **** $p < .06$

To test H2b, *subsequent attitude* regarding the Page's message was used as criterium. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that the block of control variables significantly added to the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .316$, $F = 2.768$, $p = .009$). In the final model (explaining an amount of variance of 46.3%), *previous attitude* regarding the topic shows a positive relationship with the extent to what the campaign *reflected one's own opinion* ($\beta = .387$, $SE = .130$, $p = .018$). None of the relational aspects was able to significantly add to the explained variance, suggesting that none of them can predict subsequent attitude regarding the *Burma* campaign.

Finally, H2c was tested by employing *private support behavior* of the Page's message as criterium. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that only the block of control variables significantly explained parts of the observed variance ($\Delta R^2 = .284$, $F = 5.639$, $p < .001$), suggesting a positive relationship between *support behavior* and *previous positive attitude* ($\beta = .259$, $SE = .123$, $p = .020$), *Facebook intensity* ($\beta = .231$, $SE = .122$, $p = .047$) as well as *involvement* with the topic ($\beta = .342$, $SE = .124$, $p = .005$). None of the relational aspects added to the explained variance, suggesting that they cannot predict *private support behavior* regarding the *Burma* campaign.

To summarize, H1 and H2 were concerned with the question which of the relational aspects measured for the friend-display would be able to predict conformity behavior for the two different campaigns. When reporting the results, two effects were considered that showed a Type I error rate of 6%. Against the background of the low sample size (< 80), it is suggested take those effects into account as well (see for example Conn et al., 2014). Consequently, the results can be summarized as follows: For the *nuclear energy* campaign it was found that *similarity* with the presented friends was associated with *like-intention* (H1a) and *private support behavior* (H1c), indicating a positive relationship between *similarity* and conformity behavior. None of the other relational aspects was able to contribute to the explained variance for neither of the criterium variables, which is why H1a and H1c are only partially supported. H1b has to be rejected entirely. For the *Burma* campaign, results show that *similarity* with the presented friends was also positively associated with *like-intention* (H2a), partly supporting H2a, while H2b and H2c have to be rejected.

8.3.3 Self-Presentational Audience (RQ1 + RQ2)

To test RQ1 and RQ2, mediation analyses were conducted, employing a bootstrapping procedure (5000 bootstrap resamples) suggested by Hayes (2009). The INDIRECT macro for SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2008)³ was used for this purpose. To test RQ1 and RQ2, *like-intention* for the respective Page (RQ1 - *nuclear energy*, RQ2 - *Burma*) was used as criterium variable and the perception to be *rewarded with positive reactions* from peers when *liking* the Page was employed as mediator. *Involvement*, *familiarity*, *Facebook intensity*, *previous attitude* and *number of fans* were added as control variables in every analysis. Depending on which sub-RQ was addressed, one of the relational aspects was used as predictor, while the others were entered as additional control variables. Consequently, the following scores describing the relationship towards the presented friends were used as predictors in the different analyses: a - *positive orientation*, b - *identification*, c - *similarity*, d - *interaction frequency*, e - *closeness*. All scores were z-standardized.

The analyses revealed a positive relationship between *similarity* with respective friends and the mediator (a-path, $\beta = .329$, $p = .014$) as well as *interaction frequency* and the mediator (a-path, $\beta = .625$, $p = .002$). Furthermore, *closeness* was negatively associated with the mediator (a-path, $\beta = -.543$, $p = .014$). However, for none of the predictors, the expectation of *gaining positive reactions from one's peers* when *liking* the Page mediated potential effects on *like-intention* - neither for the *nuclear energy* campaign nor for the *Burma* campaign.

8.3.4 Protective Self-Monitoring (RQ3 + RQ4)

To test RQ3 and RQ4, moderated regression analyses were conducted that followed the same pattern for all sub-RQs: *Like-intention* regarding the Page was used as criterium variable, participants' *tendency towards protective self-presentation* was used as moderator and for each analysis, a different relationship characteristic was used as predictor: a - *positive orientation*, b - *identification*, c *similarity*, d - *interaction frequency*, e - *closeness*. Consequently, for each sub-RQ a different hierarchical regression was conducted: The first step comprised all control variables used in the previous analyses as well (*involvement*, *familiarity*, *Facebook intensity*, *previous attitude*, *number of fans*), and all relational characteristics not used as predictor. The second step included the predictor and the moderator and the third step comprised the interaction term of predictor and moderator. All scores were z-standardized.

³ The macro can be downloaded here: <http://www.afhayes.com/spss-sas-and-mplus-macros-and-code.html>

For RQ3, none of the interaction terms (*tendency towards protective self-monitoring X positive orientation towards friends* for RQ3a, *tendency towards protective self-monitoring X identification* for RQ3b, *tendency towards protective self-monitoring X similarity* for RQ3c, *tendency towards protective self-monitoring X interaction frequency* for RQ3d, *tendency towards protective self-monitoring X closeness* for RQ3e) significantly added to the explained variance, suggesting that participants' *tendency towards protective self-presentation* did not moderate the effects of the friend-display on *like-intention* with regard to the *nuclear energy* campaign Page.

In the context of the *Burma* campaign, however, two effects emerged for RQ4a and RQ4b: the interaction term *tendency towards protective self-monitoring X positive orientation towards friends* added to the overall explained variance in the regression ($\Delta R^2 = .037$, $F = 4.049$, $p = .048$), just like the interaction term *tendency towards protective self-monitoring X identification with friends* ($\Delta R^2 = .049$, $F = 5.548$, $p = .022$).

To be able to interpret the interaction effects, simple slope tests were conducted (Aiken & West, 1991), using the IRSE tool (Meier, 2008). Results show that the slope for *tendency towards protective self-monitoring* is significant only when *positive orientation* towards the friends is high ($b = .28$, $p = .035$). None of the other slopes were found to be significant. The research question asked for an increase of the impact of *positive orientation* (or - because of the lacking main effects - an occurrence). Against the background of the current results, the answer to RQ4a is that *tendency towards protective self-monitoring* does not increase the effect of *positive orientation* because none of the slopes for *positive orientation* were found to be significant. However, *tendency towards protective self-monitoring* seems to have an impact on *like-intention* when participants identified strongly with the people shown in the friend-display (see figure 13).

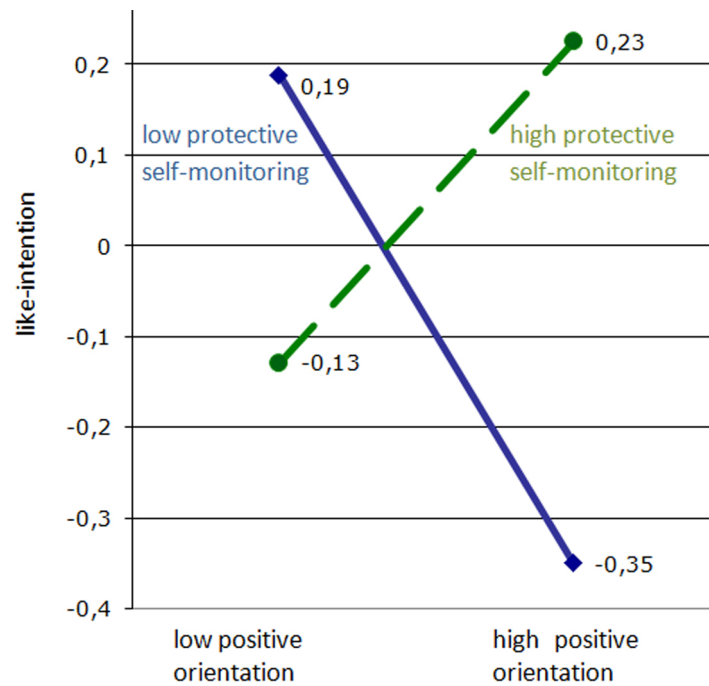


Figure 13. Plot of the Interaction Effect of Protective Self-Monitoring and Positive Orientation on Like-Intention

With regard to RQ4b, the simple slope test revealed the following: Both slopes for the impact of *tendency towards protective self-monitoring* were found to be significant, with regard to high *identification* ($b = 1.17$, $p = .011$) and low *identification* ($b = .62$, $p = .007$). The b-values suggest that the slope (in terms of the difference between low and high *tendency towards protective self-monitoring*) becomes stronger the more strongly participants identified with the people in the friend-display. Again, the simple slope tests illustrate that the specific research question RQ4b has to be answered with the observation that the *tendency towards protective self-monitoring* does not increase the impact of *identification* on *like-intention*. Rather than that, it is the effect of *protective self-monitoring* on *like-intention* that increased the more participants identified with the people in the *like-display* (see figure 14).

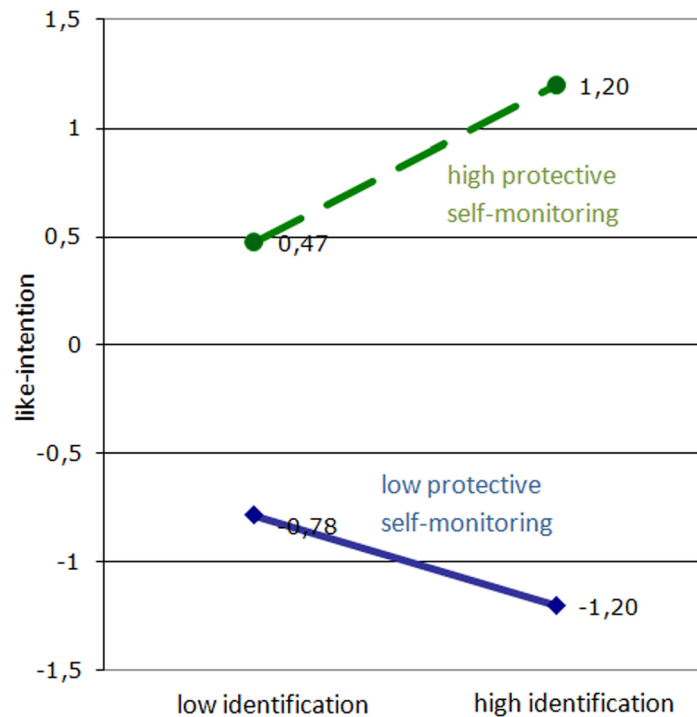


Figure 14. Plot of the Interaction Effect of Protective Self-Monitoring and Identification on *Like-Intention*

8.3.5 Influence factors for *Like-Intention* (RQ5)

Categorizing the answers given to the open-ended questions revealed seven potential influence factor for (not) *liking* a Page. Overall, 215 codings were generated, 105 for *nuclear energy* and 110 for *Burma*. The seven categories will be presented in order of prevalence in the overall sample.

Self-constructual concerns as a reason to *like* a Page or to not *like* a Page were mentioned 75 times (34.88% of all generated codings), referring to the degree to which the Page reflected participants' own opinion and their interest in the topic. A difference between both topics was observable as this aspect was mentioned more often in the context of *nuclear energy* ($n = 43$, 40.95% of all codings for *nuclear energy*) than in the context of the *Burma* campaign ($n = 32$, 29.09% of all codings for *Burma*).

One participant who would *like* the Page describes it for example this way:

"I am against nuclear energy and I want to show that" [nuclear energy]

And another participant who would not *like* the Page said:

"I am not concerned with that group of protesters" [Burma]

The second aspect (mentioned 42 times, 19.53% of all generated codings) was a reason not to *like* a Page: lacking **familiarity** with the topic. This aspect was mentioned three times as often in the context of the *Burma* campaign (mentioned 32 times, 29.09% of all codings for *Burma*) than in the context of *nuclear energy* (mentioned 10 times, 9.52% of all codings for *nuclear energy*).

"As I am only vaguely informed about that topic, liking the Page would be wrong"
[nuclear energy]

"I have never concerned myself with that topic. I feel kind of uncomfortable because of my ignorance" [Burma]

The next aspect described as reason to not *like* a Page was participants' **self-censorship** regarding political topics on Facebook or the *like*-feature in general, mentioned 41 times (19.07% of all generated codings), 23 times for *nuclear energy* (16.36%) and 18 times for *Burma* (21.90%).

"I don't give political statements on Facebook, because this usually leads to endless discussions" [nuclear energy]

"I don't want to present my political opinion about a controversial and global topic publicly on the Internet" [Burma]

The **campaign topic itself** as a reason to *like* the Page or not *like* the Page was mentioned 19 times (8.84%), 11 times for *nuclear energy* (10.00%) and 8 times for *Burma* (7.62%). In this context, both the attitude that the respective topic was relevant and deserved attention (along with the wish to distribute the message) was expressed as a reason to become a fan, but also the attitude that a *like* would not change anything (for both topics) was prevalent as a reason not to *like* the Page.

"I think all people on earth should be concerned with the topic, hence it should be discussed and considered" [nuclear energy]

"I doubt this will help the monks" [Burma]

The **design of the Page** and the presented information was mentioned 15 times (6.98%) as a reason not to *like* the Page, 8 times for *nuclear energy* (7.27%) and 7 times for *Burma* (6.67%).

"The Page does not cover all relevant arguments" [nuclear energy]

"I am not well-informed about the subject and the Page doesn't seem to be official, but amateurish" [Burma]

Another aspect mentioned 15 times (6.98%, 9 times for *nuclear energy*/8.57% and 6 times for *Burma*/5.45%) is the fact that fans receive **information updates from the Pages** they have *liked*. This was a reason to *like* a Page

"Because you get information, e.g. when there is news on the subject" [Burma]

as well as not to *like* a Page.

"I don't find the topic particularly relevant and I wouldn't want to constantly get status updates and information about it" [nuclear energy]

Finally, the presented **friends shown as fans** was mentioned 8 times as a reason (not) to *like* the Page (3.72%), 3 times for *nuclear energy* (2.73%) and 5 times for *Burma* (4.76%). Here, most answers do not contain specific reasons why friends' *likes* affected their perception of the topic. Only one person described tie strength as relevant factor for *liking* a Page (see second example below):

"It was already liked by a lot of people, also my acquaintances. Hence, the topic might be interesting" [Burma]

While another person also noted that the respective friends were a reason not to *like* the Page:

"The Page has only been liked by people I am barely involved with" [nuclear energy]

To answer RQ7, the reasons (not) to *like* a Page mentioned most often seem to be associated with self-presentational concerns in the sense of *self-construction* and associated *authenticity*, namely opinion about the topic, interest in the topic and familiarity with the topic. Furthermore, *self-censorship* was mentioned, associated with privacy concerns but also concerns about the *self-presentational audience*. Finally, the last aspect associated with conformity or self-presentation was the *presence or absence of fans* that have *liked* a Page. Here, participants did not go into more detail about reasons why this is relevant.

8.4 Discussion

The aim of study 3 in the context of this thesis was to investigate conformity processes and according motives when it comes to friend-displays on Facebook. The focus here lay on the relationship towards the influencing agent(s). Furthermore, self-presentational goals and concerns were taken into account when considering *liking* as a conformity reaction.

The methodological approach was a correlative study, using two particular stimuli and assessing conformity (behavior and attitude) as well as according predictors via questionnaire. The stimuli

represented Facebook Ads of two campaigns (that differed with regard to familiarity and involvement) with according *like*-displays. The content of these *like*-displays was not manipulated but measured via questionnaire. To ensure a causal relationship between predictors and conformity indicators, the stimulus was presented in a way that the *like*-display and the actual topic of the campaign were independent. Preliminary analyses confirmed that the content of the *like*-displays showed no association with participants' involvement of, familiarity with and attitude about the topic of the campaign. Consequently, it can be assumed that the stimulus was the origin of the observed effects, not the other way around. There was one exception, namely participants' previous attitude was found to predict interaction frequency with the people shown in the stimulus. However, as no effects were found with regard to this predictor, the effect can be neglected in the following summary and discussion of the observed effects (in order of research questions).

The first two hypotheses (H1 + H2) were concerned with the question which relational characteristics affect conformity and how this effect might differ between campaigns. Effects found suggest that only similarity can predict conformity behavior. In detail, it served as predictor for *like*-intention and private support behavior for the familiar nuclear energy campaign and as predictor for *like*-intention for the unfamiliar Burma campaign. Looking at similarity as predictor, the effects can be interpreted against the background of the concept of referent informational influence (Turner, 1991) and also social reality testing (Festinger, 1945). Those two concepts are both associated with the goal of accuracy in terms of others' behavior being indicative of subjective validity (see chapter 3.3.2.1). With regard to judgment tasks in particular, like the one at hand, similar others are assumed to serve as frame of reference (Turner, 1991). Furthermore, similarity has also been found to play an important role when it comes to self-categorization as part of a group, a process that is associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation (see chapter 3.3.2.3). When looking at results of study 1, it can be noted that similarity was often perceived as an indicator of target group fit. In the present context similarity might for example have been indicative of the degree to which the campaign topic was perceived as being fitting to one's own general preferences and attitudes. Looking at which criterium variables were affected for the different campaigns, it is first noticeable that for nuclear energy, behavior (public and private) was affected by perceived similarity, but attitude was not. The first thing that would come to mind is the process of compliance, in which behavior is changed, but not the underlying attitude (e.g. Festinger, 1953; Kelman, 1958; 1961). However, as also private behavior was altered by similarity, this explanation seems inaccurate. With regard to public conformity in form of *liking*, similarity might be indicative of a common interest and expressing that interest publicly would foster conversations with the respective people about that common interest (see results of study 1). This possibility would be likely to be associated with the conformity goal of positive self-evaluation (see discussion of study

1). When looking at the effect of private support behavior, it can be assumed that self-presentational concerns were not part of the process because there is no respective audience. Here, it seems that supporting the campaign itself was the aim (e.g. because of its quality that is communicated through others' *likes*), which would be indicative of the goal of accuracy. The fact that attitude was not affected may oppose the idea of the goal of accuracy being the underlying motive. However, it might also be the case that *like*-displays were only able to cause a behavioral reinforcement for a pre-existent attitude about the campaign (previous attitude was controlled for and showed a positive⁴ relationship with all criterium variables). In detail this would imply that although social influence might have been based on the goal of accuracy (see chapter 3.3.2.1), it did not lead to an attitude change but to a change in the behavioral manifestation of that attitude. One potential theoretical approach to explain this is social identity theory: In the context of self-categorization theory, Terry, Hogg and McKimmie (2000) for example found that attitude is more likely to be transferred into a respective behavior if that behavior is perceived as representing a norm among one's own in-group. This notion supports the aforementioned idea that the underlying motivation to yield to social influence in the present context might also be that of positive self-evaluation, as the latter is associated with self-categorization and in-group conformity (see chapter 3.3.2.3).

When looking at the Burma campaign, it is noticeable that, in contrast to the nuclear energy campaign, only *like*-intention was affected by similarity. Looking back at the discussion of the effect on private support behavior regarding the nuclear energy campaign, the question arises if the process here might have been guided by self-presentational concerns and thus by the goal of affiliation. From the block of control variables, previous positive attitude was positively associated with the intention of signing a petition, but it did not show any effects regarding the wish to *like* the Page. One explanation might for example be that the topic was too unfamiliar and that previous attitude did not show enough variance to serve as predictor for *like*-intention. However, the possibility has to be taken into account that the private support behavior really was perceived as being an expression of an existing attitude towards the topic, while *liking* the Page was not - at least for the Burma campaign. Based on this, the respective conformity reaction appears to not have been based on accuracy goals because it is not (as suggested above regarding nuclear energy) a manifestation of a pre-existing attitude. Although according to the literature review, similarity as influence factor is unlikely to be associated with affiliation goals (see beginning of the paragraph, e.g. Festinger, 1954), the aforementioned interpretation suggests that the change in *like*-intention might have been caused by affiliation goals.

⁴the relationship between the two variables in the analysis was negative (see results section). However, the interpretation would indicate that a negative attitude towards nuclear energy showed a positive relationship with positive orientation towards the anti-nuclear energy campaign

An alternative interpretation that point to the goal of positive self-evaluation will be provided after discussing results of RQ4.

RQ1 and RQ2 were concerned with the question whether the expectation of positive reactions can explain (in terms of mediate) potential conformity effects. While previous studies suggest that conformity behavior may be based on the expectation of gaining rewards from the influencing agent (the goal of affiliation, see chapter 3.3.2.2), it was assumed here that self-presentational concerns may disrupt this effect because other friends on Facebook represent an undetermined third party audience for self-presentation - similar to the study of Braver, Linder, Corvin and Cialdini (1977 in Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Results showed no effects for neither of the campaigns. Looking at the relationships between variables in more detail it can further be stated that relational characteristics of the friend-displays to some extent did affect the expectation of positive reactions from the audience (two significant a-paths were found), but that in turn the expectation of positive reactions did not have any effects on *like*-intention. This suggests that participants' perception of the self-presentational audience was indeed affected by the people in the *like*-display although objectively the audience is much larger and undetermined. However, as no mediation effect was found, the expectation of positive reactions seemed to have not been the underlying motivation for showing conformity in the context of similarity, supporting the notion outlined earlier that effects of similarity are unlikely to be based on the wish to gain positive reactions (hence affiliation goals). This effect is in line with results of study 2 in which no according effects for friend-displays were found either. However, when looking at results of RQ4, the present findings become seemingly contradictory.

With regard to RQ4, and interaction effect was found, suggesting that the tendency towards protective self-monitoring was more likely to predict *like*-intention when participants identified with the people shown in the friend-display or when they had a positive orientation towards them. As outlined in chapter 4.3.2, the construct of protective self-monitoring comprises the component of cross-situational variability, suggesting that people with that tendency are more likely to adapt their behavior to the affordances of the particular self-presentational audience in a situation. Taking that into account, it is not - as predicted - the relational characteristic which predicts conformity behavior but the relational characteristic (identification, positive orientation) that characterizes the situation as one in which protective self-monitoring becomes important for *like*-intention. This is in line with Arkin's (1981) assumption that situational characteristics and characteristics of the audience can elicit protective self-presentation based on the target's fear of social disapproval. Looking at the first moderator - identification - it is fitting that according to social identity theory the salient social identity of a person may vary depending on the given situation (e.g. Turner, 1991). Furthermore, Cutler, Lennox and Wolfe, (1984) found that people with a strong salient social identity score higher on the Concern for

Appropriateness scale than people with a low salient social identity. As described in chapter 4.3.2 and also 4.5.2, protective self-presentation (and thus the according conformity reaction) is aimed at avoiding social rejection, which in turn seems inconsistent with the process of social identification as origin of social influence at first, as the latter is aimed at gaining a consistent self-image (the goal of positive self-evaluation, see chapter 3.3.2.3) and is not so much concerned with audience reactions. However, also Arkin (1981) describes that self-evaluative processes alone may be sufficient to elicit protective self-presentation - hence, the fear of or the feeling of failing at self-presentation may also affect the latter, not only actual reactions by the audience. This explanation may also be considered to interpret the effect of similarity on *like*-intention regarding the Burma campaign (H2a). Although it was suggested that affiliation goals might be prevalent here, the involvement of similarity as predictor could also be indicative of the goal of positive self-evaluation and the respective behavior might have been a means to gain a consistent self-image. Coming back to RQ4, two possibilities can be noted regarding the second moderator, positive orientation. First, positive orientation towards a group is also part of the process of social identification. Hence, it may be the case that the observed effects were based on the goal of positive self-evaluation as well. Second, positive orientation represents a positive attitude towards the source of social influence, which has been discussed to be a crucial factor when it comes to the goal of cognitive consistency (see chapter 3.3.2.4).

It should also be taken into account that the interaction effect was only found for the less familiar Burma campaign, indicating that in this situation the fear of social rejection might have been more prevalent because a lot of people did not know anything about the topic and had difficulties making derivations about potential audience reactions. As mentioned at the end of the last paragraph, the results concerning the lack of mediation effects and the occurrence of moderation effects seem contradictory at first because the first finding suggests that affiliation goals do not play a role while the latter suggests that they might. Here, it seems worthwhile to have a closer look at the respective variables: The item used to assess audience reactions as mediator included the notion of gaining social approval while protective self-monitoring is associated with avoiding social rejection - two, as Arkin (1981) suggests, conceptually separate aspects. Consequently, the mediation unintentionally might have been concerned with acquisitive self-presentation while the latter was concerned with protective self-presentation (as suggested by Arkin, 1981). This idea implies that avoiding social rejections might have been more important in the context of *like*-behavior as a conformity reaction than gaining social approval. To some extent this is consistent with results of study 1 in which participants described fear of negative reactions but barely talked about approving reactions (except when it came to common interests). For the present purpose, it can thus be assumed that *like*-behavior (as a conformity reaction towards friend-displays) seems more likely to represent a means of protective self-

presentation. This in turn has implications for future research on this aspect, namely to acknowledge that the self-presentational concern with audience reactions (and in turn, also the conformity goal of affiliation) may be dividable into two different components: avoiding rejections or gaining approval.

In the context of RQ5, the answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed to explore whether self-presentational concerns or conformity goals are perceived as playing a role with regard to *like*-intention. Results showed (consistent with results of study 1 and 2) that self-censorship is very prevalent because attitude about, interest in and knowledge about the topic were mentioned most often as reasons (not) to *like* a Page. Furthermore, self-censorship was a salient issue. On the one hand, self-censorship can be a means of privacy protection (e.g. regarding data mining on Facebook). On the other hand, expectations of audience reactions might be the origin of self-censorship (as suggested for example by Lampinen et al., 2009 in the context of context collapse). Here, a fitting example was presented in the results section of a participant who feared that *liking* this kind of topic might lead to endless discussions. This in turn is in line with the idea that concern for appropriateness (protective self-presentation) is very likely to play a role when it comes to *like*-behavior (see last paragraph). Furthermore, another aspect mentioned as answer to the open-ended question was the friend-display. First, it is noticeable that the *like*-display is mentioned in the first place (in contrast to study 2). However, also here the problem arose that people were not able to give specific reasons for why the friend-display made a difference (as also observed in study 1). One exception was observable, which is the mention of tie strength. Just like in study 1, this seems to be the aspect that people find most salient. However, looking at the quantitative results, tie strength did not seem to play a role for conformity reactions at all (neither indicator nor predictor).

Before summarizing how the present results are associated with the guiding research questions of the present thesis, certain limitations of the present study and also implications for future research have to be mentioned. In general, it can be noted that the use of the Facepile as stimulus material in a laboratory environment turned out to be helpful because it was possible to manipulate the stimulus to a certain way so that causal attributions were possible. Still, it was not possible to control and thus experimentally vary what participants had seen in the Facepile. The question arises if it is possible to assess what was seen in the Facepile in an even more reliable way, for example by employing objective measures, such as screenshots or video recordings. At the same time, participants' difficulties in recounting the exact number of fans they had seen (suggesting it might not have been very salient) also illustrate how important it would be to combine objective with subjective measures. The second aspect that should be addressed is that although the campaign variation aimed to cover a familiar and an unfamiliar topic, this did not represent an experimental manipulation. When using existing social campaigns as stimulus, it is almost impossible to manipulate the topic in a way that

ensures that only familiarity is varied. Previous experience always has to be taken into account, just like perceived relevance and controversy (see also results of study 2 regarding the perception of the Kony campaign). Consequently, any derivations with regard to the effects of familiarity have to be made cautiously. In the present study, the aim was to further investigate the possibility that familiarity with the topic makes a difference for conformity reactions and indeed some differences were found (e.g., with regard to the role of protective self-monitoring). To further be able to generalize these findings it is necessary to smooth out the effects caused by the specific characteristics of these two topics, e.g. by employing more Page topics in a conjoint analysis (Himme, 2009) or between-subjects design to allow for a generalized analysis across several topics. The third aspect that should be considered when planning future research is the aforementioned possibility that self-presentation via *like*-displays can be based on the desire to gain social approval OR the desire to avoid social rejection. Both the conception of the the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience and that of the conformity goal of affiliation merge both possibilities, rewards as well as punishments (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; Leary, 1995; Prislín & Wood, 2005). As the present results suggest, focusing on either rewards or punishments might represent an oversimplification of the potential processes. Finally, it has to be mentioned that due to the necessary removal of 19 participants who had seen themselves in the Facepile or had their privacy settings adapted in a way that would not allow for the Facepile to be generated, the sample for the present study was lower than intended against the background of number of predictors, affecting statistical power, as the effect sizes are rather small (Cohen, 1988).

To summarize, the results of study 3 suggest that several goals for conformity might play a role here (GRQ1). The main effects of similarity on behavioral outcomes for the nuclear energy campaign can most likely be ascribed to the goal of positive self-evaluation or the goal of accuracy. In this context, it was suggested that although accuracy goals might be salient, the outcome is not attitude change but rather a change in the behavioral manifestation of an existing attitude. Furthermore, it was suggested that the effect of similarity on *like*-intention regarding the Burma campaign might have operated differently and that affiliation goals might have played a role here. Similarly, it was found the protective self-presentation affects *like*-intention of the Burma campaign, dependent on the degree of identification with and positive orientation towards the respective friends. As discussed before, these findings are not clearly suggestive of only one process of conformity: While the role of protective self-presentation as moderator and the criterium affected by similarity suggest affiliation to play a role, the respective predictors social identification with and similarity regarding the friends in the *like*-display are more likely to be associated with positive self-evaluation. With regard to GRQ2 it can be stated that relational aspects play a role, similarity and identification in particular. When it

comes to familiarity, the present results suggest that there might be differences regarding the effects of protective self-presentation. However, as outlined in the last paragraph, further research is required to confirm that these effects originate in the differences in familiarity between topics. Taking into account which self-presentational goals might affect conformity processes (GRQ3), it was found that in the open-ended questions self-construction was very salient, but self-censorship because of the audience was also mentioned. In detail, the quantitative results suggest that friend-displays to some extent affected the expectation of gaining positive reactions from the self-presentational audience. However, they did not have any influence on conformity processes. Instead, it was the concern for appropriateness (which is also part of the self-presentational goal of pleasing the audience) that had a positive impact on *like*-intention, triggered by identification with and positive orientation towards the people in the *like*-display.

Chapter 9

Discussion

9.1 Aim of Thesis and Theoretical / Empirical Approach

The aim of the present thesis was to empirically investigate social influence processes in a SNS environment, focusing on the impact of social context when it comes to attitude towards and behavior regarding organizational Facebook Pages (profit and non-profit). The *like*-feature on Facebook is regarded here as a widely used (e.g. Facebook, 2012b) representation of applications that, based on their technical characteristics and their connection to Facebook's social graph, may allow for large-scale social influence phenomena by making every user action visible to friends and other users within the network (*mass interpersonal persuasion*; Fogg, 2008). The practical relevance of this phenomenon becomes clear when taking into account that Facebook has started opening up its social graph for third parties, spreading social influence based on the Facebook network to other platforms and applications (Ellison & boyd, 2013). A review of previous empirical results revealed a gap in research to the extent that the respective studies indeed provide empirical evidence for the occurrence of social influence, but seldom focus on underlying psychological processes in order to fully understand the phenomenon. This may partly be due to the fact that also the literature review revealed a lack of theoretical approaches from social psychology and communication research regarding social influence in *anonymous* environments (Zhao et al., 2008), such as Facebook (see chapter 2.2). The three most prevalent approaches to computer-mediated communication in the last decades - the *reduced social cues approach* (e.g. Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire, 1984 in Spears & Lea, 1992), the *social information processing theory* (Walther, 1992) and the *social identity model of deindividuation effects* (Spears & Lea, 1992) - all focus on communication situations in which users are visually and/or personally anonymous and interaction partners are not initially acquainted. As social network sites in general are often used for interaction in the context of existing relationships

and users tend not to be anonymous (chapter 2.2), the necessity for a different kind of theoretical approach was emphasized.

To approach these gaps in theoretical and empirical work regarding the pervasive phenomenon of social influence on SNS via the display of other users' *likes* on Facebook Pages, the present thesis followed the suggestion of Fogg (2008) as well as Walther et al. (2011) by conceptualizing online sources and processes of social influence in terms of well-established mechanisms from face-to-face contexts. The respective theoretical and empirical conceptualization in this thesis aimed at covering social influence exerted by familiar peers (what Facebook describes as social context) as well as unknown users, while at the same time taking into account situational and personal variables that affect the process. The main concept that served as basis for the presented framework was that of social influence in the form of conformity. Based on a description of the Facebook environment (chapter 2), a definition of social influence was provided for the purpose of the present thesis as a target-centered, incidental process in which the influencing agent - a single individual or a group - does neither have to be physically present nor aware of the process:

Social influence in the form of conformity describes the act of altering one's attitudes or behavior to match those of others (single or several individuals or groups) as a result of being exposed to their attitudes or behavior. This exposure may be mediated (e.g. via CMC) and the influencing agent(s) need not be physically present or aware of the process.

Against the background of a comprehensive literature review on work that is concerned with this form of social influence, a framework was suggested, centering consequences of and impact factors for social influence around the question what goal is pursued by the target of social influence (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Wood, 2005). Based on a well-known dichotomy of social influence suggested by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), the present framework integrates similar conceptualizations by other authors (e.g. Kelman, 1958; 1961). Four different goals for yielding to social influence were identified that might be observable in the Facebook environment, along with respective conformity reactions and influence factors. Their role and respective interplay was subject of the first two guiding research questions:

GRQ1: Which goals for conformity are relevant to social influence processes regarding *like*-displays on Facebook?

GRQ2: Which situational and personal aspects affect conformity elicited through *like*-displays and in which ways?

Apart from social influence/conformity, a second concept from social psychology was taken into account for the present conceptualization, namely self-presentation. The respective literature review revealed two basic concerns associated with self-presentation and it was discussed how the particular characteristics of the Facebook environment might lead to a situation in which self-presentational concerns may override goals for yielding to social influence when it comes to public reactions on Facebook, resulting in the third and last guiding research question:

GRQ3: How do self-presentational goals on Facebook affect conformity processes regarding *like*-behavior?

The theoretical considerations were visualized within a model that integrated conformity goals and influence factors along with self-presentational concerns, depending on whether the respective reactions are private (Figure 15) or public (Figure 16), as already shown in the comprehensive summary:

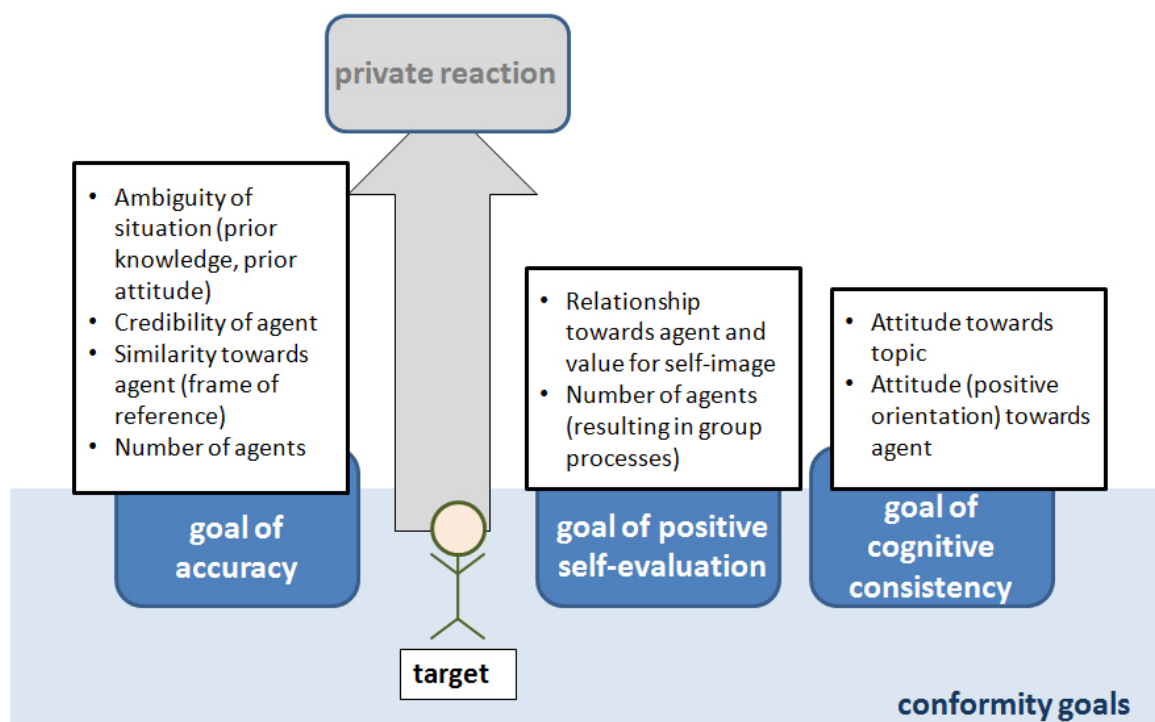


Figure 15. Conformity Framework for Private Reactions - Repetition

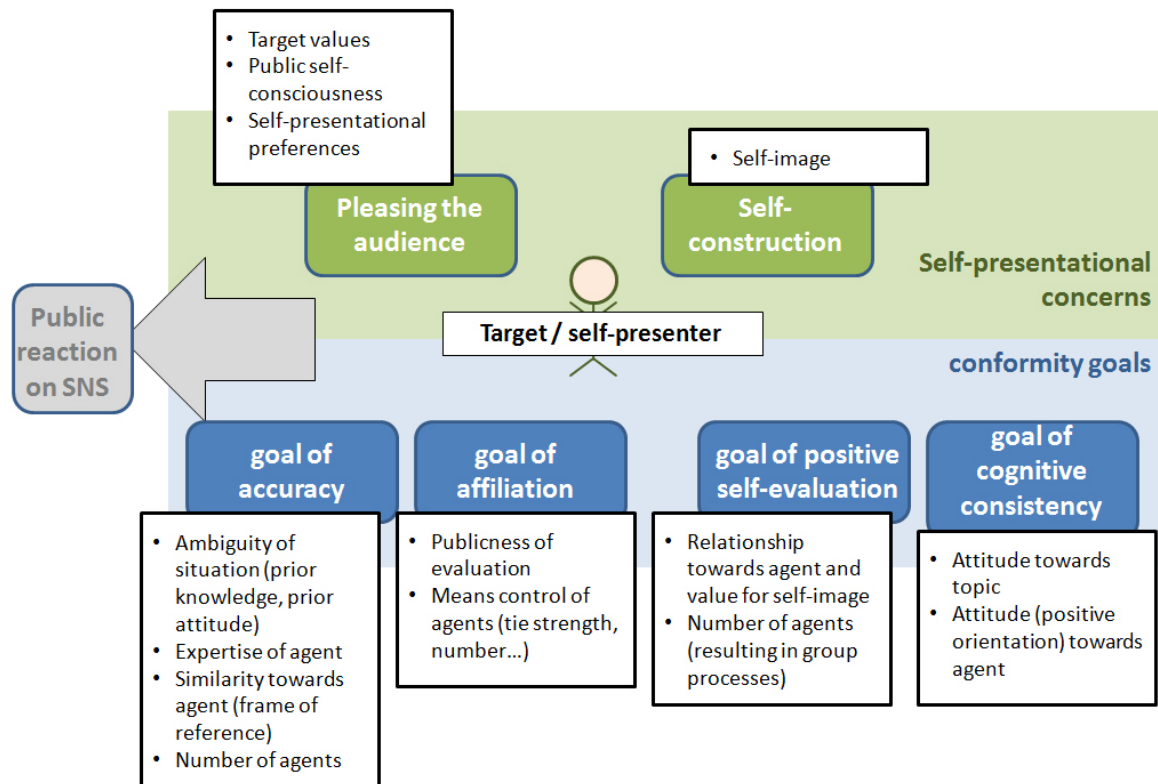


Figure 16. Conformity Framework for Public Reactions - Repetition

The empirical part of the present thesis consisted of three studies in a mixed method approach, focusing on subjective methods in a laboratory environment. As outlined before, a lot of previous empirical work on the present topic has largely focused on determining (rather than explaining) social influence processes, often using field-experimental approaches. In chapter 3.2.2 it was already discussed that, although these approaches promise high external reliability, they carry the disadvantage of being limited with regard to detecting underlying psychological processes (e.g. Shang & Croson, 2009). As the latter represent the focus of the present thesis, objective methodology combined with a field-experimental approach did not seem appropriate. Furthermore, it was noted that in the context of field experiments special consideration has to be given to ethical issues, particularly that of informed consent (American Psychological Association, 2010; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie, 2004). Therefore it was decided to focus on a laboratory environment, but partly using stimuli from the field (study 1 and 3) and also an experimental approach as an appropriate trade-off between internal and external validity. As the majority of previous research concerned with the concepts of the presented framework focused on face-to-face phenomena and had thus not applied the theoretical concepts to the environment of SNS, the empirical part of the present study started off with an exploratory study, using a think-aloud protocol combined with a semi-structured interview (study 1). This qualitative investigation of the aforementioned guiding research questions

Table 20: Overview of Empirical Studies of the Present Thesis - Repetition

| Study | Methodology | Focus/Aim | According GRQ |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | qualitative inter-view, think-aloud | determine the relevance of <i>like</i> -displays, identify potential motives and influence factors | GRQ1, GRQ2 + GRQ3 |
| 2 | laboratory experiment | explore the impact of friend- and fan-displays with a focus on number of influencing agents, investigate the role of public self-consciousness | GRQ2 + GRQ3 (based on that, inferences for GRQ1 can be made) |
| 3 | correlative laboratory study | explore the impact of relational characteristics of friend-displays and the impact of familiarity with the subject of evaluation, investigate the role of protective self-presentation | GRQ2 + GRQ3 (based on that, inferences for GRQ1 can be made) |

was meant to shed light on the question of which aspects identified in the literature review were actually observable and to gain an impression of how the different aspects (e.g. impact factors) work together. Both subsequent quantitative studies (study 2 and 3) followed the approach of varying and investigating consequences and impact factors of social influence as well as assessing self-presentational concerns to allow inferences regarding the potential underlying goals for conformity. Also both quantitative studies represented two different methodological approaches: While study 2 employed a controlled experiment, a field stimulus was used in study 3, resulting in a correlative approach. Table 20 (already presented in the introduction) gives an overview of all three studies, their methodological approach as well as foci and the question how each study addresses the guiding research questions.

In the following, the results of the empirical studies will be presented first, before the guiding research questions will be answered across all three studies by interpreting the empirical findings against the aspects discussed in the literature review.

9.2 Summary of Empirical Findings

The aim of the qualitative approach of study 1 was to explore how important *like*-displays are for evaluation processes and to see if there is anecdotal evidence about the suggested conformity

motives and the associated mechanisms. Participants were confronted with Facebook Pages of different well-known and unknown brands and were asked to describe their impressions and feelings in a combination of a think-aloud protocol and a semi-structured interview. Results show that *like*-displays are taken into account for evaluation (although participants looked for other information as well) and that both public (*liking*) and private (impression, attitude, curiosity, trying) reactions were mentioned. *Like*-displays were indicative of several characteristics of the Page's content, such as quality, popularity, prominence and the target group. Regarding the Page itself, *like*-displays were indicative of its official character. Furthermore, *like*-displays were suggestive of norms, common interests with friends, the extent to which the product was likely to meet the target's own taste and they were able to elicit the feeling of having missed something important. Fan-displays and friend-displays were described to fulfill different purposes or communicate different information: Fan-displays tended to be more indicative of a brand's general popularity, quality as well as *like*-norms on Facebook and were more likely to be taken into account in the context of unfamiliar topics. In the context of the latter, friend-displays communicated information about the target group of a brand, while for familiar brands or topics they contained information about common interests with and preferences of the respective Facebook friends. Several aspects regarding the target's relationship with the influencing agent were reported to affect potential conformity reactions: Both closeness and interaction frequency as indicator and predictor of tie strength were mentioned, just like knowledge about the friends' preferences, the composition of the group and positive orientation towards the friend(s). Regarding the influence of number of fans and friends, most participants agreed that a higher number would elicit a stronger reaction, with two exceptions: Numbers were described to interact with relational aspects (few good friends eliciting a stronger reaction than hundreds of unknown fans) and one person mentioned how large fan numbers might lead to reactance. Further influence factors that were described were concerned with how ambiguous the situation was perceived to be. On the one hand, the addressed conformity reactions showed less variance when the Page topic was well-known and the more the target knew about the topic, the less likely friend-displays were perceived to communicate information about the topic rather than the respective friends. Furthermore, *liking* the Page as a conformity reaction was only an option when the topic was familiar. Regarding prior attitude, participants described valence and strength to play a role: The stronger the target's own attitude, the less important fan-displays were perceived to be. With regard to self-presentational concerns, results of study 1 indicate that the action is perceived and aimed as being public, as all participants agreed they would not *like* a Page if none of their friends could see that action. Apart from that, it was explored which reasons participants mentioned for *liking* or for not *liking* a Page. As reasons to *like* a Page, the aim of telling others about oneself (mentioned by almost all participants) as well as the

detection of common interests with friends was named. Reasons not to *like* a Page comprised a lack of interest, concern and familiarity with the topic. Furthermore, it was mentioned how a topic was perceived as not fitting to one's personality. Finally, potential controversy was addressed as a reason to not *like* a Page along with potential negative reactions from other Facebook friends.

Study 2 employed an experimental approach in a two-factorial between-subjects design, varying the number of fans and friends on a presented mock-up Facebook Page. Two campaigns were used as stimulus Pages, an anti-nuclear energy Page and a Page calling to stop Joseph Kony, leader of a rebel army in Uganda. As dependent variables, subsequent attitude, *like*-intention and curiosity were assessed. Results across both presented Pages show a main effect of number of friends on subsequent attitude, suggesting that the campaign was perceived as being more in line with participants' attitude when a high number of friends was presented. Furthermore, an interaction effect of both independent factors was observed, indicating that the aforementioned effect of friends on subsequent attitude was stronger when number of fans was low. No direct main effects nor any interaction effects were found regarding *like*-intention and curiosity as outcome variables. However, it was found that the expectation of positive reactions from one's friends mediated the effect of number of fans on *like*-intention. Investigating both campaign Pages separately, it was observed that the aforementioned main effects of friends was replicable with regard to the Kony campaign, but not with regard to the nuclear energy campaign. The aforementioned mediation effect, however, could only be replicated in the subsample that had seen the nuclear energy campaign. It was furthermore tested, whether participants' tendency towards public self-consciousness moderated potential effects of number of fans and friends on *like*-intention, which was not supported by results, as no moderation effects emerged. Finally, it was tested which self-presentational strategies on Facebook predict *like*-intention in the present context. Both authenticity and strategic self-censorship were able to predict *like*-intention (the first aspect showing a positive relationship and the second aspect showing a negative relationship with the outcome variable), while a general audience orientation did not serve as predictor. Participants' answers to the open-ended question suggested that self-construction might have been very important for *like*-intention. A few participants furthermore addressed self-censorship regarding political topics.

Study 3 focused on the relationship between target and influencing agent, employing a correlative approach in a laboratory environment. The stimuli shown in study 3 represented Facebook Ads for two campaigns (within-subject): an anti-nuclear energy campaign (the one from study 2) and the monks' protests in Burma, each complemented with a *like*-display that presented actual friends of the participants. Relational characteristics regarding those friends were used as predictors for conformity reactions (both assessed via questionnaire). Results for the nuclear energy campaign show that

similarity with the respective friends served as predictor for *like*-intention as well as private support behavior and regarding the Burma campaign, similarity predicted *like*-intention only. There were no effects regarding subsequent attitude as criterium variable and none of the other included predictors (positive orientation, identification, closeness and interaction frequency) was directly associated with conformity reactions. Just like in study 2, it was tested whether there was an indirect effect through the expectation of positive reactions, which was not confirmed for neither the nuclear energy nor the Burma campaign by means of mediation analyses. However, for the Burma campaign it was found that participants' tendency towards protective self-monitoring was more likely to serve as predictor for *like*-intention the more participants identified with the presented friends and the more they had a positive orientation towards them. Participants' answers to the open-ended questions suggested that self-construction was a very salient influence factor for *like*-intention (because it was dependent on participants' knowledge, concern and attitude about the topic). Furthermore, self-censorship because of potential reactions from others was addressed.

9.3 Interpretation of Results

In the following, the results of all three empirical studies will be interpreted together in order to answer the presented guiding research questions, taking into account what was addressed in the respective discussion sections of each study. In general, the results depict a very complex interplay of potential conformity processes and respective influence factors, particularly when considering self-presentational aspects as well. As also suggested by Eagly and Chaiken (1993), it seems difficult to clearly distinguish processes on the basis of which conformity goals they originate from, because the theoretical basis is a very qualitative one. Consequently, processes identified in the following may overlap or not be clearly ascribed to one goal with absolute certainty. However, the aim is to gain an impression about which conformity goals may be prevalent in which situations, by associating them with the respective influence factors and outcomes.

9.3.1 GRQ1: Goals for Conformity

9.3.1.1 The Goal of Accuracy

The goal of accuracy (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; chapter 3.3.2.1) describes how yielding to social influence is aimed at making a right choice because others' behavior is indicative of appropriateness or quality. Conformity based on the goal of accuracy is often associated with a genuine change in attitude (private acceptance, e.g. Kelman, 1961) and is most likely to be affected

by previous knowledge about an issue (with less knowledge making reality more ambiguous, e.g. Festinger, 1954) as well as the credibility of the influencing agent (Kelman, 1961). Social influence based on the goal of accuracy should not be dependent on the publicness of behavior or identifiability of the target (e.g. Kelman, 1958).

Evidence for the salience of the goal of accuracy has been found in all three studies, whereas it seems to be the case that the goal might work on different levels. Depending on what information is communicated via the *like*-display, the goal of accuracy might be aimed at supporting a "right" decision based on perceived quality or target group fit and at finding out about a topic's popularity and its prominence on Facebook. These "subgoals" seem in turn to be associated with different influence factors, as will be outlined in the following.

Several authors suggest the goal of accuracy to be about interpreting information correctly (e.g. Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Hence, it represents a way of social reality testing when physical reality testing is not possible (Festinger, 1954), e.g. because the product is unknown. Considering that evaluating and *liking* Facebook Pages represent preference tasks (Prislin & Wood, 2005), it seems that there is no objectively right solution and thus, the goal of accuracy operating at this level seems unlikely from a theoretical point of view. However, also product evaluation processes might aim at making a "right" decision for the consumer on a personal level, even if objectively there is no "right" decision. For example if someone had to decide between the purchase of two similar products and Facebook *like*-displays communicated information about a product's quality (as indicated by several participants in study 1), it seems likely to assume that they may help to make a "right" decision, from the consumer's subjective point of view. Similar processes are imaginable regarding non-profit organizations or campaigns for good causes: If one was to decide which organization to donate money to or support otherwise, *like*-displays on the respective Facebook Pages might be indicative of the respective quality, e.g. in terms of impact and relevance. Furthermore, several participants of study 1 described *like*-displays to suggest which Facebook Page is the official one, hence they might also help making a "right" decision regarding the choice which Page to *like*. In this terms, yielding to social influence might be intrinsically rewarding (Kelman, 1958), for example because it helped solving the problem (Turner, 1991) of choosing which Page to *like* or which product to buy.

Closely associated with the wish of making a "right" decision were results that suggest participants derived information about a product's target group based on the *like*-displays. However, the mechanism does not seem to be that of perceived general quality but that of perceived fit with regard to one's own preferences. This aspect was for example explicitly mentioned by participants in study 1. In study 3, several effects of similarity with the presented people were found. Interpreting this

against the aspects mentioned in study 1, it can be stated that similarity might be taken into account to determine whether the respective topic might meet one's own preferences as well. It is however imaginable that the importance of accuracy goals to determine target group fit is dependent on the respective topic and the desired outcome. Extending the example mentioned in the last paragraph about a decision which good cause to support with donations, there might be a difference with regard to the two processes outlined here. While a lot of Facebook *likes* might be indicative of quality and the idea that it is worth to invest money from an objective point of view, *likes* from similar friends might be indicative of which good cause one personally is most likely to identify with and be passionate about.

Another aspect that needs to be considered when discussing accuracy goals in a context of preference tasks is that they do not necessarily have to apply to objectively "right" decisions or personal preferences but can also be concerned with appropriateness in terms of subjective validity and social reality (e.g. Festinger, 1954; Turner, 1991). Here, several aspects were mentioned in the interviews as well, such as a brand's prominence, its popularity and social norms. In the discussion of study 1 it was already argued that these aspects also touch the goal of affiliation because deviating from social norms might be perceived as leading to social rejection. The interaction effect of number of fans and friends on attitude found in study 2 for example supports the notion that the impression of popularity (in general and in relation towards one's friend network) might affect conformity behavior.

The presented framework for conformity linked the goal of accuracy to impact factors as well as conformity outcomes which may be used to determine the prevalence of this goal, just like it was done by Kelman (1961). Based on several theoretical considerations and empirical findings (e.g. Baron, Vandello & Brunsman, 1996; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) it was suggested that conformity based on the goal of accuracy should increase the more ambiguous the situation is and the more difficult it is to determine a "right" solution. Here, some results indicate differences in conformity reactions between topics, such as the main effect of number of friends in study 2 only being observable for the (less familiar, more controversial) Kony campaign, which might be taken as an additional piece of evidence for the salience of the goal of accuracy because with regard to this campaign, reality might have been more ambiguous than with regard to the nuclear energy campaign.

Furthermore, the kind of conformity reaction should be considered. Conformity based on the goal of accuracy is assumed to be internalized, thus persistent and reflected in private reactions as well (e.g. Kelman, 1961; Turner, 1991). The main effect of number of friends on attitude found in study 2 (for the Kony campaign) cannot be ascribed to affiliation goals, as only private reactions were affected. Hence, it was argued that the effect can be most likely explained by the goal of accuracy (chapter 7.4), although it was not reflected in behavior (for which self-presentational goals have to be

taken into account as well). In study 3, an effect of similarity on both private and public behavior but not attitude were found for the nuclear energy campaign. This was also interpreted as an indicator for the goal of accuracy (chapter 8.4) and it was assumed (based the finding that previous positive attitude was associated with both outcome variables as well) that *like*-displays elicited a behavioral manifestation of a pre-existing attitude (e.g. they might have been indicative of the official Page, as outlined earlier). Based on the present empirical studies, however, no derivations can be made regarding the persistence of these attitudes and behaviors in the future.

On a practical level, it was first assumed (based on results of study 1) that fan-displays would be more likely to elicit social influence based on accuracy goals than friend-displays. The last paragraphs, however, illustrate that the goal of accuracy might operate on different levels and thus, also friend-displays may be associated with it because they are indicative of a campaign's target group. Consequently, the assumptions regarding the goal of accuracy based on the current results can be summarized in a way that a) for unfamiliar topics, *like*-displays may lead to a change in attitude (e.g. indicated by the main effect of friends in study 2, interaction effect of fans and friends in study 2) and b) for familiar topics, *like*-displays may elicit a behavioral manifestation of a pre-existing attitude (e.g. indicated by the effect of similarity on private and public behavior in study 3).

9.3.1.2 The Goal of Affiliation

The goal of affiliation is concerned with the need to control the influencing agents' reaction to one's own behavior in terms of gaining social approval or avoiding social rejection (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), hence it is most likely to become the basis of conformity behavior when the evaluation is public (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Conformity based on the goal of affiliation is often associated with superficial compliance (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Kelman, 1961), indicating that the target shows a behavior without being personally convinced of its content or appropriateness. However, it needs to be noticed that not every public behavior is supposedly indicative of public compliance, and thus based on the goal of affiliation, but might also be a behavioral manifestation of a genuine attitude (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970).

As outlined in the comprehensive summary of the literature review, it was assumed that the high accountability on Facebook along with the potential for public evaluations should render the goal of affiliation very salient when it comes to conformity as a reaction towards *like*-displays. The empirical results, however, illustrate that unreflected imitation of others' behavior (as represented by public compliance) is rather unlikely. To illustrate this, the following paragraph will provide details about how the observations made in the empirical studies relate to the goal of affiliation. Several theoretical

conceptualizations of that goal (e.g. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1958; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) describe it to be aimed at gaining social approval or avoiding social rejection. In the discussion of study 3 it was already suggested that these two aspects might represent different dimensions of the same goal or even entirely different goals. Although the observation was made in the context of the self-presentational concern of pleasing the audience, it seems reasonable to take into account this distinction for the goal of affiliation for conformity as well, as it was suggested to be similar to the respective self-presentational concern (chapter 4.4).

Gaining social approval was assumed to be the underlying motivation when participants talked about a brands' prominence or general popularity on Facebook (study 1) communicated through *like*-displays. The observed mediation effect in study 2 suggested that *liking* as a reaction towards fan-displays is only likely for those people who expected positive reactions from their peers (based on the *like*-display). Both of these results seem to be indicative of a hope for positive reactions from peers based on what is suggested about their preferences through the *like*-display. Combining these two results and taking into account that the mediation was only observable for the Kony campaign, the respective fan-display might have communication information about the popularity of a product along with social norms on Facebook regarding the respective Page, leading participants to be willing to *like* the Page in order to be part of that yet unfamiliar movement and maybe gain positive reactions from others who think the same.

Regarding the second aspect of the goal of affiliation, the avoidance of social rejection, it was observable that self-censorship regarding certain topics (also based on *like*-displays) was very salient in the qualitative answers given in all three studies. The reason for that concern might have been that participants wanted to be sure not to violate any social norms that they were previously unaware of. This in turn suggests that users may look to others' behavior as orientation about what is perceived as normatively appropriate on Facebook in order to then publicly behave in accordance with one's own attitude. For example, a user might be personally convinced of the dangers of nuclear energy and thinks about expressing that attitude publicly on Facebook by *liking* the Page. However, he/she is hesitant because *liking* a political topic such as this might elicit negative reactions from others who think differently or find it inappropriate to talk about such a topic on Facebook. The *like*-display on the respective Page would then be indicative about how (un)likely such a negative reaction might be. A second example of the goal of avoiding social rejection became clear in participants' statements in study 1 about the feeling of having missed something when a topic they are unfamiliar with has received a lot of *likes*. Here it seems that users may not only be concerned with reactions from others within the application but they may also think about social interaction with their friends beyond the social network site, whereas the latter provides information about what people tend to talk about.

Finally, in study 3 it was observable (as already mentioned) that the fear of negative reactions from others may determine *like*-intention depending on how the target is related to the influencing agent; a result that has to be taken into account here as well although strictly taken it was concerned with self-presentational goals.

Also with regard to the goal of affiliation, it was assumed that its occurrence would be derivable from observations regarding certain influence factors and outcomes. The aspect that was considered most important here was that of public and private reactions (while accountability and physical contact were stable; see Insko et al., 1983). Here, an effect emerged that could be ascribed to affiliation goals (although it was not possible to distinguish between the aim of gaining social approval and the aim of avoiding social rejections): With regard to the Burma campaign in study 3, similarity showed only a direct effect for *liking* as public behavior. Taking into account the effects found on the control variables (which did not indicate a relationship between previous attitude and behavior), it was argued that this finding was not suggestive of the behavioral manifestation of an existing attitude (as outlined before) but indeed might represent a form of public compliance, independent of one's own attitude.

To summarize findings for the goal of affiliation, it seems that both the hope of gaining social approval as well as the idea of avoiding social rejection might play a role with regard to *liking* on Facebook. The discussion of affiliation goals will be combined with considerations about self-presentational concerns in chapter 9.3.3 on GRQ3.

9.3.1.3 The Goal of Positive Self-Evaluation

The third goal that was presented was that of positive self-evaluation. In detail, it is assumed that conformity based on that goal aims to maintain a positive self-image by adapting attitude and behavior in line with that of valued others (e.g. Kelman, 1961; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Social influence aiming for positive self-evaluation is independent of surveillance by the influencing agent, but dependent on the respective relationship and its value for the target's self-image (Kelman, 1958). Consequently, that goal is assumed to lead to a genuine change in attitude (in contrast to superficial compliance), but only as long as the target's self-image is associated with the influencing agent (Kelman, 1961). As outlined in chapter 3.3.2.3, that goal is also likely to be associated with group processes, such as social identification (Prislin & Wood, 2005).

According to Kelman (1961), who focused on interpersonal contexts, conformity based on the goal of positive self-evaluation is intrinsically rewarding because the respective attitudes and behaviors are associated with a positive, self-defining relationship towards the influencing agent (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In study 1, there was evidence for this kind of process when participants talked about finding

and wanting to express common interests with others. Facebook *like*-displays are indicative of other people's interests and preferences and results suggest generally positive reactions to finding out that one shares interests with friends, because of the possibility to talk about the respective interests (mostly mentioned in the context of TV shows). Furthermore, based on results of study 1, it seems that this presentation of common interests through *like*-displays might increase *like*-intention in order to communicate that common interest publicly.

From a group process perspective, the goal of positive self-evaluation might be reflected in the mechanism of social identification (Prislin & Wood, 2005), in which the group is regarded as an important part of a person's self-concept (Oldmeadow, Platow & Foddy, 2003). Against this background, the adaptations of one's own attitudes and behaviors in line with those of valued ingroups (positive reference groups) serves the purpose of maintaining a positive self-concept (Tajfel, 1974). In the presented empirical studies, several effects emerged that can be ascribed to the goal of positive self-evaluation based on processes similar to those of social identification, although - as outlined in chapter 3.2.3 - social identification is less likely to occur in *anonymous* environments like Facebook. In contrast to the Facepiles presented in study 3 and the Pages presented in study 1, the mock-up profiles and *like*-displays in study 2 were more depersonalized and indeed, the observed interaction effect between number of fans and number of friends suggests a pattern that could be described as comparative fit (Turner, 1991), regarding one's own friends as in-group and other fans as broader out-group. This effect raises the question to what extent group processes might play a role on Facebook although the environment focuses on interpersonal connections (common bonds instead of common identities; see Ren et al., 2007). Of course, the particular depersonalizing characteristics of the *like*-displays in study 2 might have rendered group processes more salient; however, also in study 3 - where interpersonal connections were displayed - several effects were observed that could be ascribed to social identification processes and thus the goal of positive self-evaluation. Social identification for example provides an alternative explanation for the observed effects of similarity on private and public behavior regarding the nuclear energy campaign that were reasonably ascribed to the goal of accuracy. As already mentioned in the discussion section of study 3, similarity within a group might strengthen the respective social identity and according conformity behavior (Turner, 1991). Consequently, the goal of positive self-evaluation via self-categorization with a valued group might also elicit conformity based on similarity with others. Finally, the interaction effect between identification with the presented friends and protective self-monitoring also suggest that social identification processes might have played a role in study 3. According to Arkin (1981), self-evaluative processes and the mere idea of failing at self-presentation (represented by a high tendency towards protective self-presentation) might already elicit respective behavior, which is why

an imagined audience is sufficient. Similarly, also conformity based on social identification is not dependent on surveillance of the influencing agent (Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004). As already suggested, it seems that high identification with the influencing agents defined the situation in a way that protective self-presentation became important for *like*-intention to maintain a consistent and positive self-image. Against the background of considerations regarding interpersonal and group processes, the question arises which of the two possibilities was more prevalent. For example, Cutler et al. (1984) found people who identified strongly with a salient social group scored higher on the Concern for Appropriateness scale also used in the present study 3, suggesting that the Facepile situation in study 3 might also have been perceived as group situation.

To summarize, the present results provide evidence for the goal of positive self-evaluation, both in interpersonal as well as group contexts. The question arises which is more prevalent in which situations (e.g. which composition and characteristics of the friend-display turns several people into a group in the social psychological sense)? In general, it might be helpful to distinguish both possibilities in future conceptualizations and also empirical studies.

9.3.1.4 The Goal of Cognitive Consistency

Finally, the last goal presented was that of cognitive consistency. Based on Heider's balance theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), this goal is addressed by a set of theories and subtheories assuming that attitude and behavioral change may emerge from a negatively perceived tension state when an individual's cognitions (e.g. the attitude towards the influencing agent and the attitude towards the subject of evaluation) are not in line with each other (Prislin & Wood, 2005). This goal is assumed to be dependent on the target's previous attitude - both regarding the influencing agent as well as the subject of evaluation (e.g. Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). As described in chapter 3.3.2.4, consequences of social influence based on consistency goals are unlikely to lead to superficial compliance; instead, a genuine attitude change is more likely, its persistence being dependent on the target's attitude towards the influencing agent.

Processes assumed to be concerned with the goal of cognitive consistency were described by participants of study 1, in a sense that they had difficulties evaluating something in a clear way when the information about the respective friends and the content of the Page were contradictory. At the same time, the attitude towards the influencing agents determined participants' initial impression of an unknown topic in study 1. In the literature review, the relational aspect assumed to be most crucial for that kind of social influence was positive orientation as a construct describing a general positive attitude towards a person or group without further differentiation of the components of that

relationship. In that sense, there was only one result in the quantitative studies that suggested cognitive consistencies to play a role, which was the interaction effect of positive orientation and protective self-monitoring on *like*-intention. A similar effect concerned with identification was already discussed in the last paragraph against the background of the goal of positive self-evaluation. Here, it can be suggested that positive orientation towards the people presented in the *like*-display led participants to behave in accordance with the presented behavior if they suffered of fear from negative reactions. Just like the goal of positive self-evaluation, the goal of cognitive consistency is not concerned with the influencing agents' actual reactions and should thus occur independent of the agents' surveillance (as also argued in chapter 3.3.2.4). However, as was mentioned before, already the self-evaluative processes concerned with the possibility of self-presentational failure might affect behavior (Arkin, 1981) or, in this case, *like*-intention. Considering the reasoning for both interaction effects and how they may be associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation and the goal of cognitive consistency respectively, the question arises to what extent these two goals might overlap. Prislin and Wood (2005) for example regarded the goal of cognitive consistency as a prerequisite for other social influence processes, e.g. because it is also concerned with a consistent self-image. Based on the present results, these two processes cannot yet clearly be distinguished.

9.3.1.5 Summary GRQ1

To answer GRQ1, it can be summarized that evidence for all three goals of social influence was found but based on the present results, the goal of accuracy as well as the goal of positive self-evaluation seem very salient, whereas the goal of affiliation does not seem to be as prevalent as originally assumed. Furthermore, the goal of cognitive consistency was evident in the qualitative interviews but the quantitative evidence is rather scarce, which raises the question to what extent the goal could be conceptualized as part of the other three goals (see Prislin & Wood, 2005). In general, it is noticeable that few effects could be ascribed to one single goal alone. On the one hand this emphasizes what was already suggested by Eagly and Chaiken (1993) about the qualitative nature of these goals, on the other hand the present explanations and interpretation can serve as basis for future research to be able to distinguish the conformity goals in more detail (e.g. by exploring the aspect of persistence of resulting attitudes).

9.3.2 GRQ2: Influence Factors for Social influence

9.3.2.1 Publicness of Evaluation

The first influence factor for social influence, discussed in more detail in chapter 3.3.3.1, was that of anonymity, whereby the aim of the literature review was to illustrate different kinds of anonymity as well as the difference between publicness and anonymity to avoid confoundings that have been found in other studies (e.g. the equation of publicness of response and physical contact, as suggested by Insko et al., 1983). As a result, it was noted that visual anonymity and accountability can be regarded as stable characteristics of the Facebook environment, while the publicness of evaluation may differ, with *liking* representing a public response. As discussed in chapter 3.3.3.1, differences between public and private reactions are more likely to be ascribed to the goal of affiliation, while for the goals of positive self-evaluation and accuracy, private responses as well as public responses should be observable. Regarding this distinction, it was first found in study 1 that both kinds of reactions are imaginable, for example impression formation and curiosity as private reactions and *liking* as well as asking about something as public reactions. In study 2 and 3, those reactions considered most relevant for the respective purpose were investigated quantitatively. Results suggest an impact of *like*-displays on both public and private conformity reactions, whereas the particular combination was used to make derivations about the underlying conformity goals. While a private reaction should preclude affiliation goals, it was assumed that a public reaction alone was not necessarily indicative of affiliation goals (see Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970), because based on the present findings it seems likely that a *like* could also represent a behavioral manifestation of a pre-existing attitude and thus be associated with the goals of accuracy or positive self-evaluation. Furthermore, a second limitation with regard to public behavior as indicator for affiliation goals arose when taking into account that *liking* (as public reaction) was found to be restricted by self-presentational concerns as well (to be discussed in the next chapter in GRQ3).

As an answer to GRQ2 it can be stated that differences between public and private reactions were found but that they do not follow a common pattern, which illustrates that respective assumptions and interpretations have to take into account the respective underlying conformity goal as well as self-presentational concerns.

9.3.2.2 Relationship towards the Influencing Agent

The next influence factor considered relevant was the relationship towards the influencing agent. When answering GRQ1, a few aspects were already mentioned, such as means control of the

influencing agent, positive orientation towards and similarity with the influencing agent. Chapter 3.3.3.2 of the literature review presented these aspects in more detail and it was noted that also the relational characteristics can (partly) be ascribed to different conformity goals. The effects of positive orientation can be explained against the background of the goal of accuracy (attraction: Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970; social identification: Prislin & Wood, 2005), the goal of affiliation (because of increased means control), the goal of positive self-evaluation (social identification: e.g. Turner, 1991) and the goal of cognitive consistency (previous attitude: Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). Similarity to the influencing agent is associated with the goal of accuracy (referent informational influence; Turner, 1991), positive self-evaluation (social identity theory: e.g. Leach et al., 2008) and cognitive consistency (Insko et al., 1983). Tie strength was introduced as a two-dimensional construct in terms of indicators (e.g. closeness) and predictors (e.g. interaction frequency). While predictors of tie strength may serve as prerequisite for social influence (based on any goal, see also chapter 3.3.3.2.3), indicators of tie strength were assumed to be associated with a positive self-concept (goal of positive self-evaluation) or more means control of the influencing agent (goal of affiliation).

Several characteristics of the relationship with the (familiar) people presented in the *like*-display were investigated in all three studies. In the qualitative study 1, the relational characteristics most salient were tie strength, knowledge about the friends' preferences (closely associated with similarity), the composition of the group and positive or negative attitude (in the literature review this was referred to as the degree of positive orientation). When comparing the results of all three different methodological approaches, certain discrepancies but also similarities arise that need to be taken into consideration when answering GRQ2.

As positive orientation towards the influencing agent has been discussed against the background of different goals, both from an interpersonal (e.g. Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970) as well as a group context point of view (e.g. Prislin & Wood, 2005), it was employed as most important predictor in study 3 as well. Results of study 1 suggest a direct relationship between attitude towards friends and subsequent attitude towards the topic of evaluation, just as suggested by the theoretical conceptualization. However, the quantitative results in study 3 do not match this pattern. In study 3, there was no direct relationship between positive orientation towards the people in the *like*-display (conceptually similar to attitude towards the influencing agent in study 1), but positive orientation was found to moderate the impact of protective self-presentation as predictor for *like*-intention. In the discussion section of study 3 as well as in the last sections, it was already argued that the interaction effects found in study 3 might be related and that positive orientation can also be regarded as a part of the construct of social identification. In that sense, the concept of positive orientation or attitude towards an influencing agent could be ascribed to different goals depending on how interpersonal the situation is perceived

by the target. This aspect could be investigated further by assessing to what extent the Facepile in study 3 was perceived as consisting of a group rather than single individuals. At the same time it has to be considered if and how the construct of positive orientation as part of the social identification construct might differ from the construct of attitude towards the influencing agent from a consistency (and thus cognitive psychology) point of view and if and how it might differ from the construct of interpersonal attraction from the perspective of the goal of affiliation. Finally, as a means to clarify this discrepancy and sort out the role of the respective constructs, it seems worthwhile to take into account limitations of qualitative self-report data by questioning to which extent people are able to describe how they feel about the influencing agents in a very detailed and distinct way. For example, if someone says "I like that person" - which in study 1 was ascribed to the construct of attitude towards the influencing agent - might that be suggestive of other, more distinguished processes as well, such as social identification or similarity?

Regarding knowledge about the influencing agent, one participant in study 1 referred to the respective person's expertise about the topic while the rest, and thus the majority, of statements was concerned with potential common interests and humor that participants shared with the influencing agents (similarity). Results show that similarity was the most important predictor in study 3 for private as well as public conformity and these effects have been discussed against the background of different goals already: Focusing on similarity as predictor (independent of the criterium variable), it was noticed that this aspect might be indicative of referent informational influence (Turner, 1991) and social reality testing (Festinger, 1954), hence the goal of accuracy. In group contexts, similarity has been discussed to play a role for self-categorization as part of an important reference group (Turner, 1987), associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation. Consequently, it is imaginable that similarity may communicate different information depending on the situation, which in turn is suggestive of different underlying processes. Taking into account that similarity may be indicative of target group fit (see study 1) or serve as indicator for common group membership, the question arises whether there exist different kinds of similarity associated with different conformity goals, that represent common characteristics between two people on different levels. While in the context of social identification and also social comparison processes, similarities between the target and the influencing agents can be very marginal and not topic-related (e.g. a common major in college; see Spears, Lea & Lee, 1990) and still elicit conformity, it is imaginable that similarity that addresses the goal of accuracy has to be somewhat related to the topic of evaluation. For example, it might not make a difference for the evaluation of a TV show if the influencing agent has the same birth date or is interested in the same sports club but a commonly shared sense of humor or interest in the same TV genre may be crucial for social influence based on accuracy goals. Conceptually and empirically that would imply that the

second conceptualization of similarity - topic-related similarity - is also covered by processes of social identification as long as the respective social self-image is valued. As the measures from study 3, as a result of the exploratory factor analysis, covered parts of both aspects - general similarity and topic-related similarity, it is not yet clear which process the respective results can be ascribed to.

Tie strength as impact factor for social influence has been often employed in laboratory as well as field experiments (see chapter 3.2.1 and 3.3.3.2.3). It has been noted that conceptually, the two dimensions of this construct have often been confounded (see chapter 3.3.3.2.3), which is why interaction frequency as predictor of tie strength and closeness as indicator of tie strength (see Marsden & Campbell, 1984) have been regarded separately in this thesis. Furthermore, the literature review revealed that it was difficult to assign tie strength to one or more particular goals for conformity in the context of the presented framework. The empirical evidence from study 1 and 3 then revealed discrepancies regarding the role of this influence factor: While both interaction frequency and closeness (the latter operationalized via the mentioning of "close friends", e.g. in contrast to "acquaintances") have been stated to affect potential conformity reactions in study 1, none of the aforementioned aspects were able to significantly predict conformity in study 3. To summarize, this aspect was very salient in the qualitative study while no effects were found in the quantitative studies. Again, it is questionable how precisely participants in a qualitative interview can describe how they feel with regard to a person presented in the *like*-display (see last paragraph on positive orientation), suggesting that the underlying process might have been a different one apart from tie strength. Nevertheless, also a lot of previous studies suggest that tie strength plays an important role for social influence. This raises the question to what extent tie strength might be confounded with other aspects in the present and also past research as well, particularly when it comes to interaction frequency but also when it comes to closeness. For example, if tie strength is conceptualized by interaction frequency on a SNS (e.g. Bond et al., 2012) or by a categorization as "friend" within a SNS (e.g. Muchnik et al., 2013), is it really tie strength alone that characterizes the respective relationship or is it possible that users tend to communicate more with people that are similar to them or that they tend to perceive those as close friends who they feel positive about? It is thus imaginable that the assessment of tie strength (particularly interaction frequency) represents an oversimplification of the relationship characteristics because the underlying process crucial for social influence is a different one; however, as it co-occurs with tie strength, it cannot be identified if not assessed explicitly. This in turn illustrates the importance of employing subjective measures when investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms of social influence. Against the background of the present results, the relevance of tie strength as influence factor for social influence remains questionable.

In the context of depersonalized presentations of fans and friends in study 2, one last relational aspect should be discussed at this point, the role of friends versus fans. Results of study 1 suggest that both *like*-displays tend to communicate inherently different information which can be ascribed to different processes of social influence (e.g. fans being indicative of quality or popularity and friends being indicative of target group fit). Against the background of the interaction effect of friends and fans in study 2, the question arises how differently these two groups are perceived in terms of group cohesiveness and also potential self-categorization. Are "fans" the more comprehensive group which includes "friends" or do "fans" represent an out-group to "friends" (as suggested in one of the last paragraphs on affiliation goals)? It is imaginable that this may be dependent on the respective topic and a target's prior attitude, for example it might be that "fans" of a TV show that the target is fond of are perceived as in-group (because of common interests) while in a different setting, "fans" might be perceived as out-group.

To answer GRQ2 for relational aspects, it seems that similarity represents a crucial factor for social influence, assumingly either because of the goal of accuracy or positive self-evaluation. Furthermore, regarding public reactions, results indicate that group processes (social identification, positive orientation) might characterize a situation in a way that makes it necessary for the target / self-presenter to pursue a style of protective self-presentation when it comes to *liking*. Interpreting the present findings on an interpersonal versus intra-group level, it seems that while in the qualitative interviews, interpersonal (in contrast to intra-group) processes were dominant (e.g. tie strength, knowledge, similarity), the overall picture when taking into account results from study 3 as well indicates that also group processes might play a role on Facebook.

9.3.2.3 Ambiguity of the Situation

One of the most crucial aspects to affect social influence processes (presented in the literature review (chapter 3.3.3.3) and also observable in study 1) was ambiguity of the situation, which included the target's previous attitude about the topic off the Facebook Page as well as his/her familiarity with it. The more difficult it is to solve a task (in the present situation, to determine the quality and appropriateness of the message), the more likely people are to conform (Coleman et al., 1958), particularly when the goal of accuracy is pursued (Baron et al., 1996). Similarly, theories associated with the goal of cognitive consistency (e.g. Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) suggest that the stronger the target's previous attitude about the subject, the less likely it is to become subject to change.

Results of the present thesis show that depending on how much the target knew about the topic, the *like*-displays communicated different information associated with different conformity goals (e.g.

quality and popularity for unfamiliar products and norms for familiar products). Based on the results of study 1 it was furthermore suggested that familiarity with the topic represents a necessary condition for *liking* the Page as conformity reaction, which is closely associated with the respective self-presentational goals (see next subchapter on GRQ3). The aspect of ambiguity was further varied in study 2 and 3 and although interpretations have to be made cautiously as the variation did not represent an experimental manipulation, it seemed that target reactions differed depending on the topic. Both results of study 2 and 3 support the idea that *like*-displays do not cause *liking* as public behavior but that they guide it when the necessary conditions of familiarity and positive attitude are fulfilled (for example suggested by the effects of similarity on *like*-intention and private support behavior in study 3). In contrast to that, results of study 2 suggest that for the unfamiliar topic, the target's attitude - hence a private reaction - was adapted by means of the *like*-displays.

Based on the present results, GRQ2 can be answered by stating that ambiguity of the situation may play an important role for conformity processes on Facebook, particularly when taking into account public reactions and that starting from the variation of topics in this thesis, the target's attitude about a topic as well as familiarity have to be taken into account as influence factors.

9.3.2.4 Number of Influencing Agents

Finally, the last influence factors presented in chapter 3.3.3.4 was the number of influencing agents. Although there exist several theoretical approaches and competing empirical results with regard to the question what the exact relationship between number and strength of conformity is, most of them agree that the relationship is a positive one (Asch, 1955; Insko et al., 1983; Insko et al., 1985; Lee & Nass, 2002). Based on results of several empirical studies outlined in chapter 3.3.3.4, it was assumed that the effect of group size might be ascribed both to the goal of accuracy and the goal of affiliation (e.g. because of increased means control). Furthermore, it was suggested that group and interpersonal processes might interact (Egebark & Ekström, 2011) and be associated with the goal of positive self-evaluation in the context of self-categorization theory (Sassenberg, 2011).

Regarding the Facebook *like*-feature, the present results can be summarized in a way that the number of influencing agents might not be the most crucial influence factor for conformity. First, it was noted by some participants in study 1 that few fans might as well elicit the wish to help by *liking* the Page (which would indicate a negative relationship). However, that seems to be very dependent on the target's relationship towards the content (see study 1). The second exception from study 1 that found support in study 3 was that relational characteristics of the *like*-display were more important than the actual numbers. In study 3, about a third of all participants who were confronted with

friends in the Facepile were not even able to recall the exact number of fans. This illustrates very well that *like*-displays seem to be more efficient when they display actual friends instead of plain numbers and that in the light of the first aspect, the latter may decrease in relevance for potential conformity reactions. Although a large number of fans has been reported to be indicative of quality and popularity in study 1 and were also found to alter attitudes as well as *like*-intention in study 2, it seems that this aspect is not as crucial when further information about the respective friends is presented (as also supported by Egebark & Ekström, 2011). Taking into account the differentiation between friend- and fan-displays in general in the last paragraph, the question arises to what extent numbers communicate different information than the display of actual friends (e.g. thinking about the differentiation between interpersonal and group processes) and whether they might interact. However, to answer this question, further research is required. Based on the present results, RQ2 can be answered by stating that the number of friends and fans does affect conformity reactions but that the inclusion of further information about the respective friends might override this effect.

9.3.3 GRQ3: The Role of Self-Presentational Concerns in Conformity Processes

In the context of the presented conformity framework, it was suggested that a *like* - depending on how public the action is perceived to be - may be used as a means of self-presentation on Facebook and thus be guided by respective concerns. A review of recent conceptualizations of self-presentation in terms of impression management (e.g. Baumeister, 1982) revealed two basic self-presentational concerns: self-construction and pleasing the audience (e.g. Leary, 1995). It is the particular characteristics of social network sites described in various previous empirical studies that was assumed to not only make self-presentational concerns very salient (e.g. Krämer & Winter, 2008), but also to distinguish the situation from face-to-face contexts: The broad and undetermined audience along with context collapse ask for a self-presentation that is tailored to a variety of audience preferences and takes into account different stages of audience knowledge regarding the self-presenter (see chapter 4.6.1.3). As a consequence, self-presentation on SNS has been found to be very authentic in previous research (rather than deceptive, e.g. Toma & Carlson, 2012), hence it was assumed to be based on the goal of self-construction (Krämer & Winter, 2008) more than on the goal of pleasing the audience. As it was noted (chapter 5), that on social network sites the group of influencing agents (people in the *like*-display) and the self-presentational audience do not necessarily overlap, the question arose how self-presentational concerns affect conformity processes. In this context, two personality aspects were introduced in the literature review (and investigated in study 2 and 3) that are assumed to be associated with the extent to which a conformity target/self-presenter is concerned with potential reactions of the audience and thus likely to show conformity. People with

a high public self-consciousness (chapter 4.5.1) have previously been found to be more concerned with managing their impressions (e.g. Buss, 1980 in Leary, 1995) and seem thus more likely to yield to social influence, based on the goal of affiliation (e.g. Froming & Carver, 1981 in Leary, 1995). Also an individual's tendency towards protective self-presentation (chapter 4.3.2 and 4.5.2) has been associated with interpersonal influence previously (e.g. Wolfe et al., 1986), based on the "desire to avoid significant losses in social approval or actually garnering social disapproval" (Arkin, 1981, p. 314) rather than aiming to gain social approval.

To approach the guiding research question about how self-presentational concerns might affect social influence processes, the empirical results obtained within the present thesis can be ascribed to several aspects of the research question: First it was validated that self-presentation on SNS is indeed a foreground agenda also with regard to *like*-intention. Furthermore, it was assessed to what extent self-presentation by means of *like*-intention is guided by which self-presentational concerns and the last aspect focused on the question to what extent the perceived self-presentational audience and the influencing agents from a conformity point of view overlap in situations where a user is confronted with *like*-displays.

Regarding the first aspect, the qualitative interviews served the purpose of determining whether participants perceived *liking* as being a means of self-presentation, a way of showing rather than telling (Zhao et al., 2008) about one's self-image. It became clear very quickly that *liking* was perceived as being public and other-directed in nature, similar to a friendship book, because interview participants basically agreed that *liking* a Page would not fulfill a purpose if nobody else would be able to see it. Regarding the underlying self-presentational concerns, participants' answers in study 1 as well as answers given to open-ended questions in study 2 and 3 suggested that self-construction may be a very crucial concern as the self-presenters' interest, concern and familiarity with the topic were mentioned as important prerequisites for *liking* something. Similarly, authenticity has been found to be the most important predictor for *like*-intention in study 2. This is in line with previous empirical results on self-presentation on social networking sites that suggest self-presentation to be very authentic, although strategic (e.g. Haferkamp & Krämer, 2010). On the one hand, these results illustrate what has also been assumed based on the literature review, namely that self-presentational concerns might conflict with goals for conformity when the goal of pleasing the audience is not pursued (in accordance with the conformity goal of affiliation, see chapter 3.3.2.2). Due to the characteristics of social networks on Facebook (such as multiple audiences and the warranting principle), deceptive behavior such as superficial compliance aimed at pleasing the influencing agents is unlikely because of the way users aim to present themselves on SNS.

Nevertheless, the self-presentational audience was taken into account by participants across all three studies, addressing aspects such as self-censorship because of the way other friends think about the topic (e.g. study 1) as well as a general tendency not to be willing to share a political opinion or an opinion about a controversial topic on Facebook (study 2 and 3). Furthermore, strategic self-censorship also served as predictor for *like*-intention in study 2. In study 3, it was found that the fear of failing at self-presenting oneself (a person's tendency towards protective self-presentation, see Arkin, 1981) predicted *like*-intention in situations where a consistent and positive self-image might have been at stake, namely when participants identified with the people in the *like*-display. Hence, in study 3 the fear of social rejection was more important than gaining social approval (no mediation effect was found), suggesting that *liking* might be guided by concerns of protective self-presentation. Here, it seems at first that not only the goal of self-construction on SNS may interfere with conformity goals but also the aim of pleasing the audience - if the imagined audience does not overlap with the influencing agents (the latter referring to the people presented in the *like*-display).

However, there were several results that suggest the imagined audience at least partly to be affected by the presented *like*-displays. For example, in study 2 it was found that number of fans affected the expectation of positive reactions positively (which in turn affected *like*-intention). Interpreting this finding, it seems that the presented *like*-display may have raised the salience of supporters of the topic within one's own network which in turn led people to think that their peers' reactions are likely to be positive. The question arises which characteristics of the *like*-display caused this effect, for example no effects were found for the number of friends (study 2) and the characteristics of the relationship with the presented fans (study 3). It may be the case that only fan-displays elicit this effect, although from a theoretical point of view this would seem unlikely, as objectively the friend-displays contain more precise information about the preferences of one's friends than the fan-display. Taking these results together and further taking into account different information communicated by fan- and friend-displays (study 1), it is also imaginable that the expected positive reactions from one's peers are not based on ingratiation (by imitation of behavior, caused by the conformity goal of affiliation), but something else. For example, if fan-displays communicate information about the quality and general popularity of a topic, the aim of *liking* the respective Page might be to elicit positive reactions from others because one has identified a trend that one's peers are not yet familiar with. In that case, the mediation effect found in study 2 would not suggest an overlap of influencing agents and self-presentational audience but on the contrary, it might also suggest that there are two entirely different social forces at work. At the same time, it suggests there might be a process in the context of affiliations goals that has not been considered in the literature review yet: Yielding to social influence because the *like*-displays are indicative of popularity, yet the actual aim is to impress the

self-presentational audience - not via imitation but via setting a trend. The aim of gaining positive reactions in this way fits very well to the idea of acquisitive self-presentation as a tendency towards attraction seeking (Jones, 1964 in Arkin, 1981), as also described in chapter 4.3.2.

To summarize the answer for GRQ3, the present results not only suggest that *liking* is a means of self-presentation on SNS, they furthermore illustrate that there is potential for self-presentational concerns to compete with conformity goals. Respective consequences for the proposed model of social influence on SNS will be presented in the next chapter.

9.4 Theoretical Implications

Based on the present results it is possible to adapt the theoretical model proposed based on the literature review. The first adaptations concern the goals of accuracy and positive self-evaluation, which have been very evident in all three studies within this thesis. In the context of the goal of accuracy it was argued, that processes might have to be distinguished based on whether they aim to assess general quality (in order to make an objectively right decision) or the target group fit of a campaign (in order to make a decision appropriate for one's own preferences). Both processes are suggested to be affected by different influence factors, namely expertise and topic-related similarity, respectively. With regard to the goal of positive self-evaluation, the present results illustrate that both group as well as interpersonal processes might play a role in a SNS environment, as positive orientation and social identification processes were observed to affect *like*-intention. Although the latter observations were made in the context of a public reaction, it is assumed that similar mechanisms might also affect private reactions (based on what was stated about the target not being required to be under surveillance by the influencing agent, see e.g. Turner, 1991) and thus deserve further attention. Furthermore, it was suggested that effects of general similarity (e.g. common affiliations in contrast to topic-related similarities such as shared interests) might also play a role in this context. Evidence for the goal of cognitive consistency as isolated process has been very scarce, raising the question to what extent it can be conceptualized as part of the other goals as well (see Prislin & Wood, 2005). However, as based on the current results it cannot clearly be stated whether a potential mismatch in the concept or a potential mismatch regarding the respective influence factor of attitude towards the influencing agent was the cause for this observation (see chapter 9.3.1.4), the goal of cognitive consistency should remain a part of the framework until further research can clarify this aspect. The first adaptations to the aforementioned goals are presented in Figure 17.

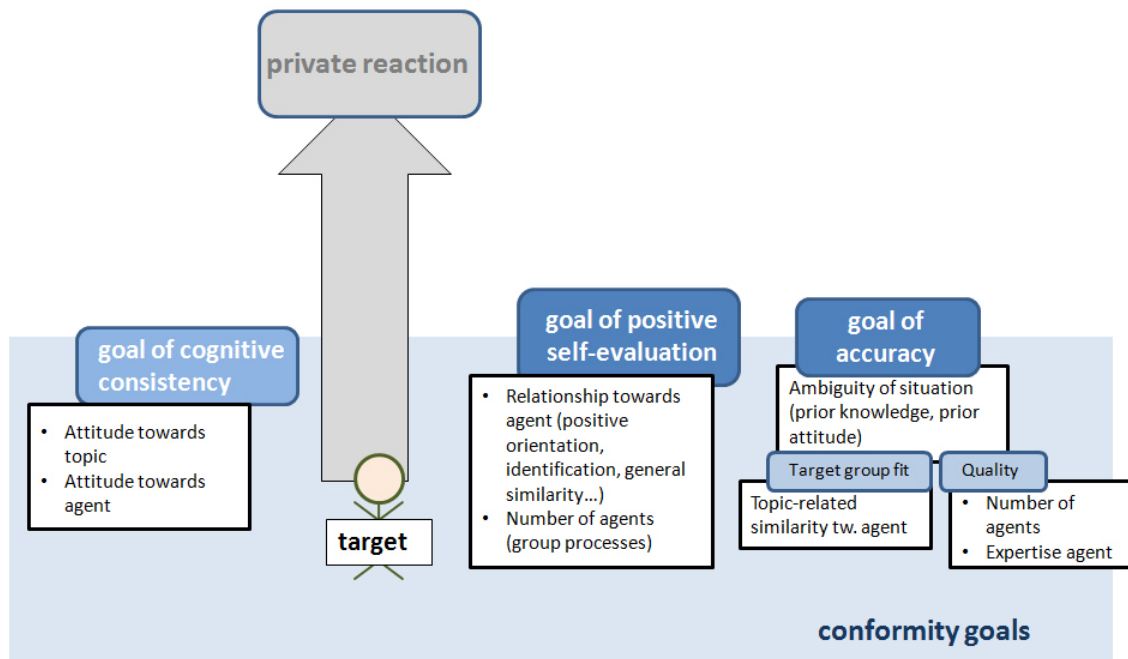


Figure 17. Conformity Framework for Private Reactions - Update based on Results of Empirical Studies

When public conformity reactions are considered, the overall picture gets even more complex than in the first proposed conceptualization. First, the empirical evidence of the present studies suggests that the goal of self-construction associated with an authentic self-presentation is very prevalent when it comes to *like*-behavior. Consequently, the fulfillment of this self-presentational concern represents a sort of necessary condition, followed by conformity goals and the goal of pleasing the audience, which seem to guide respective behavior. In a practical way this would imply (see also Figure 8 in chapter 6.4) that the option of publicly *liking* a Page only arises if the subject is familiar, one has a positive attitude about it and is somewhat concerned with it. Hence, a *like*-display might elicit curiosity regarding an unknown topic but before this curiosity is expressed in a public reaction, it needs to be validated by personal experience and knowledge. In a second step, characteristics of the *like*-displays and perceived self-presentational norms guide the respective behavior. In detail, the goal of accuracy, the goal of positive self-evaluation and the goal of cognitive consistency are assumed to work in the same way as with regard to private reactions. However, for the goal of affiliation - which is very closely associated with the self-presentational concern of pleasing the audience - further adaptations are suggested. First of all, as argued in chapter 8.4, it seems reasonable to distinguish between the goal of gaining positive reactions and the goal of avoiding negative reactions, as also reflected in the concept of acquisitive and protective self-presentation (and according self-monitoring tendencies). The present results suggest that protective self-monitoring may be very powerful in guiding respective

behavior (based on self-presentational norms, such as avoiding controversial topics); nevertheless there is evidence that *liking* may also represent an acquisitive self-presentational strategy (the impact of fans on *like*-intention was mediated by the expectation of positive reactions). Results of study 2 can be interpreted in a way that self-presentational audience and influencing agents overlap or it can be interpreted in a way that they do not (see previous subchapter). Assuming that the first assumption is fitting, the processes assumed to describe acquisitive self-presentation would be characterized by an audience/influencing agents overlap. In contrast to that, protective self-presentation is additionally guided by another social force which sets the boundaries for the appropriateness of a behavior in the first place (e.g. for which kind of topics self-censorship might be necessary). This case fits the conceptualization of the two competing social forces suggested in the comprehensive summary. The adapted model described in the last paragraph is displayed in Figure 18.

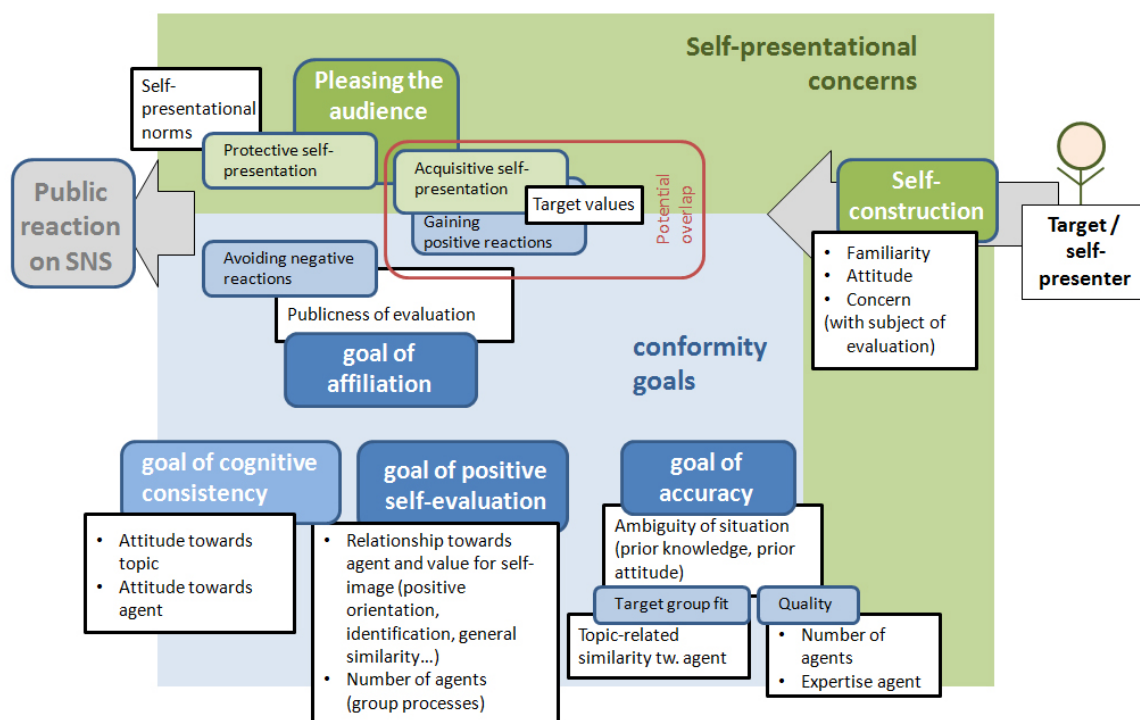


Figure 18. Conformity Framework for Public Reactions - Update based on Results of Empirical Studies

Two additional issues shall be raised at this point, which have become visible in the course of the thesis and should be taken consideration. First, a lot of anecdotal evidence from all three studies suggests that participants found it inappropriate to share a political opinion on Facebook. At several points it also became evident that this was partly due to the fear of potential social rejections and thus the concern was assumed to be based on protective self-monitoring. This in turn implies there might be a perceived, unwritten norm among Facebook users not to use the platform for political expression

or the discussion of political (and similarly religious) issues. Uski and Lampinen (2014) also found several indirect norms to be salient on Facebook. Although the avoidance of political topics were not among the norms they have identified, the present findings suggest this norm might exist. The question arises where the origin of this norm lies and whether this aspect is generalizable to Facebook in general or only applies to certain subgroups that were dominant in the present sample (e.g. college students). Furthermore, based on the present findings that *like*-displays may communicate how appropriate it is to *like* a Page, one might assume that the perception of these implicit norms might be affected by the presentation of others' *like*-behavior.

Secondly, it was noted (in the context of the goal of positive self-evaluation in particular), that evidence for both interpersonal as well as group processes was observable in the present thesis. This is particularly interesting when taking into account that the social identity model of deindividuation effects suggests that processes of social identification are unlikely in situations where individual idiosyncrasies are very salient (e.g. Spears & Lea, 1992), such as on SNS (Ren et al., 2007). However, the SIDE model has been criticized a lot for the strictness of its assumptions and respective preconditions such as visual anonymity (e.g. Walther & Carr, 2010). As mentioned before, also Knoll (2013) found it inappropriate to apply SIDE to SNS. Nevertheless, he found evidence for collective influence on SNS with regard to online users' purchase intention as well as sharing intention. In this context it seems noticeable that the origin of SIDE, the social identity theory, stems from face-to-face contexts, suggesting that the perception of an interaction in terms of a group identity depends on characteristics of the respective situation, such as perceived depersonalization of the self and others (e.g. Turner, 1991). Consequently, the question arises which characteristics of a situation on Facebook may render a social identity salient. It is for example imaginable that the presentation of friends in contrast to a number of anonymous fans represents a more personalized situation in which idiosyncratic characteristics of the respective familiar people override potential perceived common group memberships. At the same time, the respective knowledge about the presented friends in the friend-displays might represent crucial information to raise salience of common group membership, for example if all presented friends are of the same gender (see results of study 1) or attend the same college or sports club (e.g. Spears, Lea & Lee, 1990). Furthermore, it is imaginable that not only a user's knowledge about the presented friends defines a situation in terms of a group or interpersonal situation, but the presented information. As already mentioned, SIDE would suggest that visual anonymity (for example in the form of not presenting profile photos or using depersonalized profile pictures) would make a social identity more salient (Spears & Lea, 1992). However, there exist several results that suggest the profile photos can be crucial for making a social identity salient, e.g. through visual similarity (Lee, 2004) or by emphasizing common group membership through visual

fit (see e.g. Lea, Spears & Watt, 2007). Against the background of these results, it is imaginable that the exact design of a *like*-display (not only the question of whether friends or fans are displayed but also the question of which friends are displayed together, whether photos are displayed and how similar these photos are) might define the situation as group or interpersonal in nature.

Overall, the presented theoretical approach has proven to be useful to investigate social influence processes on SNS such as Facebook, as evidence for the respective conformity goals was found. Particularly when the social context as crucial factor for social influence is considered, the present framework provides clear benefits in comparison to earlier conceptualizations of social influence in CMC regarding the applicability to the Facebook environment (see chapter 3.2.3). As became evident in the current chapter, the framework not only considers the relationship towards the influencing agents but further situational and personal aspects - "adjusting screws" that can be used to characterize the respective environment in detail and subsequently allow for the deduction of respective assumptions for social influence based on these characteristics.

9.5 Methodological Implications

The present thesis employed a mixed method approach, so that disadvantages of each method may be flared out by advantages of others. For example, study 1 as a first exploratory was necessary to be able to interpret the quantitative results from study 2 and 3 because previous studies could only provide loose evidence about which mechanisms might be observable in a SNS environment. This way, it was possible to derive alternative explanations for certain findings, for example that a large number of fans might eventually elicit reactance instead of conformity.

The approach used in study 3 turned out to be useful for the investigation of social context apart from field experiments. The method employed here can be regarded as uncritical from a research ethics point of view because it was possible to ensure informed consent. One particular result shall be discussed at this point because it might hold implications for the interpretation of field experiments on Facebook as well. The present results suggest that similarity served as important predictor for behavior. The respective stimulus material was created in a way that allowed clarity regarding the direction of the effect, hence causality. In detail, the presented content was combined with social context (in the form of Facepiles) in a way that both were independent (supported by the findings that participants' previous attitude and familiarity with the topic were not associated with the content of the Facepile). Had the Facepiles shown friends of participants who were actual fans of the presented campaigns, it would not have been clear whether potential behavioral reactions were to be ascribed

to the process of social influence elicited by similarity towards the presented friends or whether these particular friends were presented because they shared a similar attitude with participants. In the second case, participants' behavioral reactions would not have been elicited by the similarity with the presented friends but solely by their own attitude. These considerations raise an issue that needs to be taken into account when planning and interpreting field experiments that employ existing relationships. For example, if a field experiment were to show that the presentation of social context increases *like*-behavior and that interaction frequency (assessed by means of social network analysis) moderates the effect, two potential interpretations might be possible: a) the presentation of close ties (in terms of interaction frequency) caused *like*-behavior or b) those participants who already had a positive opinion on the topic were more likely to *like* the Page and were more likely to be confronted with close ties (in terms of interactions frequency). Consequently, depending on how field experiments are employed and how / whether they set up or assess the respective social context, the causality of the found effects needs to be questioned.

9.6 Practical Implications

As outlined above, the present results suggest that *like*-displays can guide *like*-behavior and furthermore elicit an impression or initial attitude about an unknown topic. These reactions might be associated with different goals that marketers pursue with the maintenance of a Facebook Page, for example conveying a positive impression (branding, consumer relationships), eliciting curiosity about a new product or viral processes (in the form of electronic word-of-mouth).

It was found that social context is more efficient in eliciting (or guiding) these effects than a mere number of fans. Considering this finding, it does not seem surprising that Facebook recently made social context (if available) a fundamental component of all paid Facebook Ads (Facebook, 2014). Marketers can still decide themselves whether to target solely friends of existing fans of a Page - a strategy that seems promising (provided the potential reach is high enough) against the background of the present results. Furthermore, when taking into account that similarity with the presented fans served as predictor for conformity effects, combining the aforementioned "friends of fans"-targeting with an interest-based targeting seems even more promising for marketing purposes in order to confront users with topics that friends who share similar interests (related to the topic of the Page) have *liked*. In the present thesis, this combination was most efficient in affecting according public and private behavior.

It was argued initially that the Facebook environment is very promising for electronic word-of-mouth processes. Based on the present results however, it seems that viral effects caused by *liking* of the Page is limited by potential self-presentational concern of the users. In detail, it seems unlikely that a user who is confronted with an unfamiliar Page that a friend has *liked* will engage in this behavior as well right away. Consequently, it might be more difficult for an unknown brand or a Page with a controversial message to collect new *likes* because of potential self-presentational norms on Facebook. Alternatively, marketing content that meets the purpose of self-presentation or allows for respective adaptations is more likely to elicit viral effects. From a marketer's perspective, the respective concept is that of value for the customer, often associated with content marketing and entertainment (Wikipedia, 2014). The idea to "trick" users into *liking* something in order to gain more reach on Facebook, e.g. by presenting entertaining content that - in the terminology of the present thesis - meets self-presentational goals on Facebook, has recently turned into a trend (*like-baiting*) that Facebook responded to by punishing Pages that engage in this behavior, for example with a decrease in reach (Facebook, 2014b). Consequently, providing content that meets users' self-presentational goals without offering true value and being related to the topic of the Page might even hold certain dangers for Page owners.

9.7 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations that concern foci and methodological aspects of the presented studies have already been discussed in detail in the respective discussion sections. It is noticeable, that several of the previously mentioned limitations apply to the respective kind of methodology. For example, in the context of the interview study (study 1), the sample size and according limitations with regard to generalization of the results have been mentioned, just like the problem of demand characteristics, particularly when it comes to the topic of conformity and the associated concern of being (negatively) evaluated as a conformist by the interviewer (see Leary & Kowalski, 1990). As mentioned before, the second aspect was addressed in study 1 by taking several precautions (e.g. talking about all aspects of a Facebook Page and not just the *like*-displays) to distract participants from the real subject of the study. Another aspect mentioned in the context of study 1 was, that participants seemed to have difficulties to explicitly verbalize reasons for conformity. This aspect became salient again, when comparing results of the qualitative and quantitative studies with regard to the characteristics of the relationship participants shared with the friends presented in the *like*-display: the finding that tie strength was very salient in study 1, but did not show any effects in study 3 suggest certain discrepancies in what participants of study 1 verbalized and what the relationship

actually characterized in more detail (see chapter 9.3.2.2). This finding in particular emphasizes the usefulness of a mixed method approach to detect discrepancies like the one just mentioned. Some of the shortcomings of the methodology of study 1 were addressed by the approach used in study 2, such as limited generalization, along with a high internal consistency. However, the stimulus used in study 2 and the experimental nature of the latter did not allow for the integration of actual social context, like it was done in study 1 and 3. Consequently, the experimental approach of study 2 is limited with regard to external validity and the topic of how characteristics of the relationship towards the influencing agents affect conformity. Furthermore, the situation in study 2 might have been perceived as somewhat artificial (suggested for example by the lack of results for the manipulation check regarding the control condition), which in turn affects external validity negatively. The aforementioned shortcomings of study 2 were again addressed by the methodology of study 3, which allowed the integration of social context (and thus the investigation of relational aspects in more detail), but lacked the strong internal reliability of study 2. As outlined in the method section of study 3, several precautions when creating the stimuli were taken to ensure a clear interpretation of the direction of potential effects. Nevertheless, due to the nature of the correlational approach, it was necessary to include a variety of control variables (e.g. previous attitude) that were not absolutely needed in study 2, in which participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. To summarize limitations noted for the single studies, it can be stated that the mixed method approach employed in the present thesis helped to flare out disadvantages of each methodology by another methodology, in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the topic at hand.

Apart from the limitations noted for every single study, there are a few limitations that apply to the overall thesis, which need to be addressed. First, all three of the presented studies focused on very particular Page topics, hence based on the present results it is not yet possible to generalize these findings accordingly (e.g. to topics like books, music or sports clubs) or determine differences in conformity and self-presentational behavior between different kinds of topics (e.g. brand promotions in study 1 or social campaigns in study 2 and 3). This issue is also associated with concerns raised in study 2 and 3 about the effects ascribed to familiarity with a topic. The variations employed within the present thesis were not sufficient to determine the cause of effects with absolute certainty, as topics also differed with regard to other aspects, such as controversy. Consequently, future research should not only explore other topics but also take into account methods that allow for a broader generalization by smoothing out effects of individual topics, for example by means of conjoint analyses (Himme, 2009), as already suggested in the discussion section of study 3.

The second aspect that needs to be addressed is the fact that *like*-intention was assessed, but not actual *like*-behavior. Consequently, derivations about actual behavior should be made cautiously,

although according to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) "the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance", provided that the acting agent holds volitional control over the respective action (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Based on this, it is suggested that assessing behavioral intention represents the next best method apart from assessing actual behavior, the latter of which holds certain difficulties: Assuming that a *like* on Facebook might elicit reactions from peers (as the present results suggest) and thus affect reputation and well-being accordingly, assessing actual *like*-behavior was not ethically tenable here, as the presented stimulus was manipulated in certain ways and thus did not represent a *like*-display participants would encounter in the course of their everyday Facebook experience. This aspect has to be taken into account for future research, particularly when it comes to field experiments where actual behavior is assessed and in which stimuli are manipulated to a certain extent.

When addressing the kind of outcome variables assessed in this thesis, along with the methods of assessment, it has to be noticed further that based on the present results, derivations about the persistence of attitudes and behaviors are hardly possible, with one exception: Taking into account that *like*-behavior is perceived to be a very public action in front of several self-presentational audiences, it can be assumed that a public action in this environment is characterized by a certain persistence (not across a longer period of time but across several social contexts). However, also temporary persistence represents an important indicator for the kind of conformity outcome (private acceptance or superficial compliance), as outlined in chapter 3.3.1. For future research it is imaginable to employ a paradigm used by Kelman (1958), in whose study participants' attitude about the topic of the treatment was measured in different contexts and across different periods of time.

The next limitation to be addressed at this point is that of external validity of the stimuli used in this thesis. As the present studies employed a forced-exposure paradigm, the according results cannot provide information about conformity behavior when the respective Page and the *like*-displays are presented as a part of a larger News Feed. For example, it is not yet clear whether a stimulus like the one used in study 3 would receive as much attention if presented among other information. This issue holds further potential for future research, in which for example a respective stimulus can be combined with additional information or within an actual Facebook News Feed (in a field approach). Regarding the latter idea, it needs to be noticed that in the actual Facebook environment, the News Feed algorithm works in a way that might cause confoundings with regard to conformity studies. Content that is presented in the News Feed is filtered based on different criteria, such as the users' past behavior and also previous interactions with the content (Facebook, 2014a). As posts from Pages that have received a lot of *likes* and comments are more visible, this mechanism causes a pre-selection based on others' behavior. This in turn might cause confoundings in field experiments

in the sense that users are more likely to see (and thus react to) content that others have evaluated positively as well, making it more difficult to determine causality.

Finally, as a shortcoming of the present studies, the respective samples have to be mentioned. While in study 2, a broad sample was collected (regarding age and occupational status), study 1 and 3 focus on a student sample and thus a certain age group. This of course has consequences when it comes to generalizing the present results to other groups. For example, it is imaginable that self-presentational concerns on Facebook and the perception of certain implicit norms differ between age groups. Particularly the present finding that there seems to be a norm about self-censorship when it comes to political topics might not be generalizable to other age groups (or other majors), in which a political opinion is manifested more strongly (statista, 2012).

Apart from the directions for future research derived from limitations of the present studies, the presented theoretical framework itself holds great potential for future research. For example, open questions remained regarding the potential subdivision of accuracy and affiliation goals: Do *like*-displays communicate different kind of information that appeal to the goal of accuracy in different ways, depending on the subject of evaluation? Would for example a high number of fans or the expertise of a familiar friend be indicative of quality and thus have impact on a decision that aims to be "right", while in a situation where the decision aims to assess a subject's fit to personal preferences, similarity with the influencing agent would be more important? With regard to affiliation goals, do topics of Facebook Pages differ with regard to their likeliness to be used for protective or acquisitive self-presentation and how do *like*-displays and personal characteristics affect the respective processes? Furthermore, as already mentioned, the present results suggest that perceived norms on Facebook might affect conformity behavior, raising the question to what extent they can be altered by *like*-displays and to what extent those may differ between groups of users (see previous paragraph). In addition to these aspects, the present results also raise questions with regard to the differentiation of interpersonal and group processes. In the previous chapter, it was already outlined how different characteristics of the *like*-display might render a social identity salient, although the Facebook environment is inherently *anonymous* (Zhao et al., 2008). For future research, it is not only imaginable to vary certain characteristics of the *like*-displays (such as the mention of names versus presentation of profile photos), but one could also think about assessing to which extent a situation like the one in study 3 of the present thesis is perceived as interpersonal or group-related, in order to be able to further determine which characteristics of the *like*-display (and maybe also which characteristics of the perceiver) play a role for the perception of the situation. Based on that, future research could investigate which relational characteristics in particular affect conformity, based on whether the process is a group process or an interpersonal one.

Finally, further ideas for future research comprise the application of the present framework to different contexts. On the one hand, it is imaginable to explore different contexts on the Facebook platform, such as the evaluation (and according behavior) when it comes to single posts instead of Pages or the evaluation (and according behavior) when it comes to friends' posts instead of those of third parties. In study 1, one participant mentioned the desire to help a favored Page with his own *like*; likewise it is conceivable that when it comes to friends' postings, even more psychological processes come into play, such as social support or empathy, which could be expressed by *liking* a content. Finally, future research could also apply the present framework to different social network platforms. In chapter 2.4, it was described how mechanisms such as the *like*-feature and according social context is also prevalent on other platforms, e.g. Twitter or Pinterest. Depending on the characteristics of the respective social network, self-presentational concerns and thus conformity reactions could differ between these platforms, making further research worthwhile.

9.8 Conclusion

The present thesis aimed to investigate how and through which mechanisms social influence works on SNS, focusing on the display of other users' *likes* on organizational Facebook Pages. Due to a gap in previous theoretical conceptualizations of social influence on SNS as well as respective empirical work, a new theoretical approach was suggested in which well-established concepts from social psychology were applied to the Facebook environment. The core of the resulting framework consisted of goals for yielding to social influence which were complemented by different kinds of outcomes, influence factors and self-presentational concerns, the latter of which were concerned with public conformity reactions. The three presented empirical studies followed a mixed-method approach to investigate the guiding research questions that were derived from the framework from different perspectives and with different foci. Empirical results suggest that the theoretical approach is useful for explaining social influence processes on SNS, as several of the proposed goals for yielding to social influence could be observed. Compared to previous theoretical conceptualizations, the present approach considers not only social context (based on existing relationships between connected users) but also the nonymity of the environment, the latter of which holds extensive consequences for public conformity behavior (because self-presentational concerns may interfere with conformity goals). In the course of the present thesis, the theoretical model was created based on previous research from face-to-face contexts and specified based on the present results. Due to the complexity of the framework, further research is required to further specify the different mechanisms in more detail. However, it is this complexity that at the same time provides a certain flexibility (e.g. in contrast

to SIDE) which should allow the framework to be applied to other SNS as well and also different situations than the one investigated in the present thesis.

Chapter 10

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